

CITY COUNCIL  
Sunbury PA 17801  
January 23, 2012  
6:15 pm

A regularly scheduled meeting of the Council of the City of Sunbury was called to order with the Honorable David L. Persing, Mayor, presiding. There was a quorum with the following in attendance:

David L. Persing, Mayor  
Todd E. Snyder, Director of Accounts and Finance  
Joseph J. Bartello, III, Director of Public Safety  
Kevin E. Troup, Director of Public Works  
James R. Eister, Director of Parks, Recreation and Public Buildings

Other City officials in attendance:

Elizabeth Kremer, City Treasurer  
Michael Rhoads, Property Maintenance Officer  
Joe Swope, Code Officer  
Stephen Mazzeo, Chief of Police  
Terry Specht, City Clerk

There were fourteen (14) visitors present.

### **PUBLIC HEARING/2012 CDBG PROJECTS**

Ms. Jamie Shrawder from SEDA-COG brought council up to date regarding the 2012 CDBG projects and new guidelines. There is a state requirement that entitlement communities receive \$300,000 so Ms. Shrawder is waiting to hear what will happen if funding is cut to a level lower than that. The estimated funds available are \$281,210. The eligible activities that were submitted are attached to these minutes. CDBG funds may be used for street improvement, infrastructure, neighborhood revitalization and economic development. 70% of the funds must be used to benefit low/moderate income (LMI) people. Sunbury is city-wide low/moderate income so any activity that benefits the entire City qualifies for CDBG funding. 30% can be used for elimination of slum and blight, which the Redevelopment Authority has been doing. Response to urgent need is also 30% of eligible funds. The Fair Housing Notice and Antidisplacement Plan must be followed. Section 3 Preference Statement states that the City will target low income business for participation in federally-funded projects. The next public hearing will be held on March 26<sup>th</sup> to choose projects. Ms. Shrawder asked for other proposals to be submitted. Councilman Eister asked about funding for tree plantings and Ms. Shrawder said there is a program and she will find out if Northumberland County is eligible. Councilman Bartello asked if the funding level increase/decrease will change the SEDA-COG administrative fees. Ms. Shrawder answered that she does not know what that will be at this time. Mr. Seigel will meet at a later date with the mayor to discuss their administrative fees. Councilman Troup asked to have \$40,000 added for repairs to the street trees on Market St. Mr. Mike Rhoads asked if the determination for sidewalk repair is taken from the City's zoning maps and Ms. Shrawder answered that residential neighborhood sidewalks cannot use the city-wide LMI, a survey must be taken in particular neighborhoods to be sure the residents are LMI. An environmental review must be done on all projects selected. A discussion was held in regard to a \$5,000 request to purchase fire hose for the fire department and whether an environmental review has to be completed. Ms. Shrawder said every project must have an ER done. It does not pay to do small projects with CDBG funding. Councilman Snyder said the Riverfront Project has been delayed for different reasons and he asked if funding should be set aside for that project. Councilman Eister said he didn't think there was a need. 2011 CDBG funds have not been received yet and that amount should finish the project. Ms. Shrawder discussed the blighted properties project as a previously funded project which is done under slum and blight. Any properties sold after being cleared using CDBG funding would have to be sold to LMI people. Or the public can comment on the reuse of the property. Most of the properties have a negative value and that is why they are cleared. Councilman Bartello said he has a problem with "negative value" and it is real estate so it should have value. Mayor Persing explained that if it is torn down for \$20,000 and the property is worthless because it is burned-out, it has a negative value. Tearing down and disposing of the debris is approximately \$15,000 per property. The lots are small and most can't be rebuilt on. The properties on the list to be cleared using 2011 CDBG funding are 1031 N. River Ave, 608 S. Front St, 128-130 South St, 121 Julia St and 202 Washington Ave. Ms. Shrawder asked for any public comment regarding the above discussion. There was none. The program income coming back through the Housing Revolving Loan Program and the sale of the benches in Cameron Park and old CDBG funds that no one knows where they came from must be reallocated into other CDBG eligible activities. Ms. Shrawder suggested \$6,671 to planning for the Persing complex (18%), to the RDA for demolition in the amount of \$9,255 (30%) and \$21,596.10 to the downtown improvement façade program. The CDBG public hearing adjourned.

## **2011 PROGRAM INCOME**

Councilman Eister moved to re-allocate the program income into the following programs:

18% to planning for the Persing complex \$6,671

30% to Redevelopment Authority for demolition \$9,255

\$21,596.10 to downtown façade

Second – Troup. Unanimous vote.

## **REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY UPDATE**

Mayor Persing explained that the actual list the Redevelopment Authority is working on is much greater than discussed at this meeting. He will get a list to council members so they can view the properties. The RDA will prioritize the properties.

## **LAND BANK**

Councilman Bartello said he thinks some of the properties should be land banked so they might be sold at a higher value if there is more than one property.

## **2<sup>ND</sup> READING 121-2 PEACE AND GOOD ORDER**

Mayor Persing moved to pass on a second reading the addition to 121-2 Peace and Good Order in the *Code of the City of Sunbury* to include the definition and word usage of Multi-convicted Illegal Substance Distributor and Illegal Substance Distribution Listing (see attached). This will be added to the ordinance under definitions. When council discusses the landlord/tenant ordinance he would like to see it included but at this time it is just to add the wording to the definition list. Second – Eister. No – Bartello. Yes – Troup, Eister, Persing, Snyder. Motion carried.

## **1434-1436 MARKET ST/HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT APPROVAL**

Mayor Persing said this is the property coming in to the City on the right. It is the last home left in the flood zone in that area. Mayor Persing moved to allow Ms. Delsite to apply for a FEMA grant to purchase the property. The City would be responsible for 3-5% of the project which would not be more than \$7,000. There is a garage in the rear of the property and that would not be torn down. A home cannot be built on that property so it could be used as a pocket park or recreation area. The deadline for applying for the grant through FEMA is nearing and the project could take up to 2 years. Councilman Bartello asked if the City was buying this property and the answer is yes. Two other properties in that area were sold to the county and the county turned them over to the City. This property was not sold at that time. Second – Eister. Unanimous vote.

## **INCREASE PERCENT OF FIRE DAMAGE INSURANCE ESCROW**

Councilman Eister said he does not think the percentage the City keeps for fire damaged properties is enough to cover tearing down the property if the owner walks away from it. After general discussion this subject was tabled until more information can be reviewed. Councilman Eister and Mr. Rhoads will review the needed information.

## **INCREASE BAD CHECK FEE**

Councilman Snyder moved to change the bad check fee to \$30.00 from \$25.00. Second – Eister. Unanimous vote.

## **APPROVAL TO PAY INVOICES**

Councilman Snyder moved to pay the invoices listed on the vouchers payable report in the amount of \$149,037.69 from the general fund and \$1,142.90 from the liquid fuel account as funds are available. Second – Eister. Unanimous vote.

## **AUDIENCE COMMENT**

Mr. Larry Underkoffler asked what the purpose of the new rental permit \$1,000 fee is. Mayor Persing explained it goes into the general fund. He continued that it was established many years ago because of the high percentage of rental properties the City has as a way to discourage new rentals. In 2011 there were 24 people that paid the fee for new rentals. Mr. Underkoffler said it is not friendly to local landlords and he feels he is being penalized as a local citizen to have to pay that for a rental property that has been in his family for many years. Mr. Underkoffler said he has 6 empty units on Market St. where his business is located and to use them he thinks \$1,000 is excessive. Councilman Bartello explained the fee is for residential properties only, not commercial. Councilman Eister explained this

City is double the national average for rentals. The reason the fee was enacted was to slow the rate of new rentals. The money is used to help run the code office. Mr. Underkoffler said landlords pay \$50 per year for each rental unit and the money also goes to help run the code office. Councilman Troup said if all the rentals were like Mr. Underkoffler's it wouldn't be such a problem but there are landlords that don't put any money into their units and they become nuisance properties. Mr. Underkoffler's mother rented 1201 Susquehanna Ave for many years and lived in 1203. When it was vacant Mr. Underkoffler's son moved in. When his mother passed away he renovated 1203 and his son moved to 1201. He then renovated 1201 and it became a rental property again. He added that he is guilty of not keeping up to date with the rental permits. His bookkeeper left his employ that always paid for the rental permits on other properties. When he went into the code office to pay for them he said he would also like to pay for 1201-1203 Susquehanna Ave. - that is when it was discovered that years ago Mr. Underkoffler told the code office they were no longer rentals because his family was living there. Councilman Eister said he is in the same scenario because his daughter lives in one of his rental units and when she moves he will have to pay the \$1,000 if he wants to rent it again. Mr. Underkoffler said instead of charging the \$1,000 he would rather see an incentive for local property owners to keep their properties up. Mayor Persing explained this is why council is looking to update the landlord/tenant ordinance. Mr. Brad Niemic wondered how many multi-family homes were demoed that would have dropped the percentage of rental units. No one knew the exact answer but there were some double homes torn down. Mr. Underkoffler concluded by saying Northumberland and Selinsgrove do not charge a fee for new rental units and their annual fee is only \$10. Councilman Snyder explained that with the new landlord/tenant ordinance and reorganizing the code office there should be a monumental shift in revenue because they will be armed with a more user friendly and more effective way to do their job. If that happens, council can re-evaluate whether fees like the \$1,000 should be kept.

Mr. Joe Swope said Mr. Underkoffler's properties are in good shape. The code office cites people many times and sometimes that is less expensive than fixing the property up.

Ms. Kremer said she had people tell her that the public works department did a great job on the streets after the last snow and they wanted her to relay that at a council meeting for a public thank you.

Mr. Gene Swanger said there is a rental property next to him owned by someone that lives out of town that does nothing to his property. There are tenants in and out all the time from out of the area. Mayor Persing explained that is why the landlord/tenant ordinance is so important.

Ms. Cora Campbell said every time she loses a tenant, the people that apply for the rental get worse. Or someone rents a property and they bring more and more people in to live that are not on the lease. Mr. Niemic said he does background checks and uses commonsense when making decisions who to rent to.

### **LANDLORD/TENANT ORDINANCE**

Councilman Troup explained that he and Councilman Snyder met to discuss the Berwick ordinance. They feel they need additional tools in the code office for an ordinance to work. Councilman Snyder said Councilman Bartello has been meeting with the code officers to discuss operational issues and software packages. They feel it is something that can be implemented but must be done in the proper way with the proper tools. Councilman Troup said council now has to sit down and discuss the ordinance that will be good for Sunbury and implement by summer.

### **313-315 VINE ST and 716 N. 7<sup>TH</sup> ST**

Councilman Eister stated that this property has been torn down. 716 N. 7<sup>th</sup> St. should be down in the next month. Mayor Persing said the individuals that built the handicap planters in Central Park are looking for more locations.

### **BUILDING SECURITY**

CareerLink has installed building security on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors of city hall so any discussion after meetings should happen on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor.

### **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Mayor Persing said the Planning Commission has 45 more days to review the Comprehensive Plan before recommending/not recommending it to council to adopt. This will take place at the February 27<sup>th</sup> meeting and no other items will be on the agenda.

There being no further business to discuss the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Specht  
City Clerk