



SHAKER HEIGHTS

Neighborhood & Economic Development Committee Minutes
Wednesday, May 10, 2023
6 P.M.

Members Present: Carmella Williams, Chair, Council Member
Anne Williams, Council Member
Nancy R. Moore, Council Member
Eric Bevilacqua, Committee Member
David Owens, Committee Member
Dr. Donna Whyte, Committee Member
Benjamin Woodcock, Committee Member

Others Present: Jeri E. Chaikin, Chief Administrative Officer
Kyle Krewson, Director of Building & Housing
Brendan Zak, Neighborhood Development Specialist

The meeting was called to order by Chair, Carmella Williams at 6:01 p.m.

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Approval of the March 8, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Chair Carmella Williams:

Good evening everyone, welcome to the May Neighborhood and Economic Development Committee meeting. We will start with approving the minutes from last month's meeting. Are there any changes or corrections to the minutes from March? If not, is there a motion to accept the minutes?

Dr. Donna Whyte, Cmte. Member:

Approval

Chair Carmella Williams:

I will give the tie to Dr. Whyte, second by Council Member Anne Williams. All those in favor please say aye, raise your hand.

Thank you, the minutes are accepted. We will flip the order tonight. We will start with the application to acquire a city owned vacant lot at 3590 Hildana Road for side yard. Mr. Zak you will be presenting, go ahead.

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Application to Acquire City Owned Vacant Lot at 3590 Hildana Road for a Side Yard

Brendan Zak, Neighborhood Development Specialist:

Thank you. Tonight we have the application from Ms. Cinnamon Anderson. She lives at 3594 Hildana Road. She's applied to the city to purchase 3590 Hildana Road parcel number 73521148. Ms. Anderson plans to use the side yard to expand her outdoor living space and gardening space. The city owned lot is 45 feet wide and 160 feet deep. Ms. Anderson's home is to the left of the vacant parcel in the picture on the first page of the memo. The city acquired this parcel in October, 2011 and demolished the house in 2012. The applicant meets the qualifications and conditions for the program. The applicant's home is owner occupied. The applicant's property is not in foreclosure and is current on property taxes. There are no outstanding building, housing or zoning code issues and as part of this application the property will be permanently consolidated with the vacant lot.

The proposal is consistent with the city and neighborhood goal of expanding the size of lots in the neighborhood. The city has no redevelopment plans for this vacant lot and the agreement will specify that any large trees on the property must remain unless there is a documented disease or other natural event that requires a removal of the tree. Tonight we are requesting that the Neighborhood and Economic Development Committee recommend to Council the acceptance of the application by Ms. Cinnamon Anderson and enter a purchase agreement with her to acquire 3590 Hildana Road for \$1 through the side yard program, and she should be here with us tonight if we have any questions.

Chair Carmella Williams:

Is Ms. Anderson on the line? Ms. Anderson we appreciate you being here. Thank you. Members of the committee, does anyone have any questions for Ms. Anderson? Council Member Williams.

Anne Williams, Council Member:

Thank you for being with us tonight and happy to see this application. I have a question. I'm going to ask this on behalf of Councilwoman Moore who's not here. And that is the question about trees which she always appropriately brings up. Are there major trees on this side lot? It looks like there's one pine tree. I don't know if there are other trees? What is your plan with the trees that are on that site?

Ms. Cinnamon Anderson:

I would welcome the trees that are there, but when the house was torn down they planted possibly bushes. And I think, I don't know what kind, it might be a tree there. It's very little if it is. I'm not sure if it's a pine tree? I would definitely keep those there. There was one, twice they tried to plant trees in the front. You know how you have the sidewalk and then the tree lawn. The first one they planted, I guess maybe it got sick or something, they tore that out, there's another one growing.

Anne Williams, Council Member:

I can't see many from the picture. I was curious whether there was anything else there. And I see Councilwoman Moore is now with us, she might want to add in on this.

Nancy, I was the voice for the trees.

Nancy Moore, Council Member:

Thank you. Yes, if there are no trees on a lot, we ask that a tree be planted. This is not an infill but an adjacent lot. If you have a frontage, usually when a house is demolished there is a planting that is even with the front of your house on the adjacent lot, that's probably what you have. If you want to keep that, that's great. That's wonderful. The trees will grow bigger. I think there would be the concern where we've lost trees there's no canopy and that means there's no shade. That means also when we have these torrential rains like we've been having, the storm water can as easily run into your house as to be absorbed by the tree. So for all those reasons, we love trees to be planted if there aren't already trees there. We can't require, we just asking you to consider it. Thank you.

Chair Carmella Williams:

Thank you Ms. Anderson and Council Members Williams and Moore for protecting our tree canopy or strengthening our tree canopy. Are there any other questions from members of the committee? Go ahead Dr. Whyte.

Dr. Donna Whyte, Cmte. Member:

I want to make a comment and thank you. Thank you for your interest in buying the side lot. There's quite a bit of development on Hildana and the fact that you're purchasing the side lot certainly contributes to this as well. I just want to thank you for your interest and this is a perfect time of year. Thank you so much.

Chair Carmella Williams:

Thank you Dr. Whyte. If there are no additional questions from the committee, is there a motion and a second?

David Owens, Cmte. Member:

Yes, I second.

Chair Carmella Williams:

Thank you Mr. Owens. And for the record, the ask of the committee is to recommend to Council the acceptance of the application by Ms. Cinnamon Anderson to enter into a purchase agreement with Ms. Anderson to acquire the city owned vacant lot located at 3590 Hildana. And for the record, we had a motion from Mr. Woodcock, seconded by Mr. Owens. All those in favor say aye or raise your hand.

Thank you. Are there any objections or abstentions? The application has been unanimously approved by the committee. Thank you again Ms. Anderson.

Ms. Cinnamon Anderson:

Thank you very much.

Chair Carmella Williams:

You can hang around if you would like or you can go about your evening. I'm sure you have plenty of design plans for that lot next door.

Ms. Cinnamon Anderson:

Thank you. I'm going to leave but thank you all very much. I appreciate it.

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Request to Approve Funding for CitizenServe

Chair Carmella Williams:

The last item on tonight's agenda is a request to approve funding for CitizenServe presented by Director Krewson.

Kyle Krewson, Director Building/Housing Dept.:

Thank you Councilwoman Williams. Thank you members of the Committee. City staff tonight is requesting that this body recommend to Council approve an amount not to exceed \$45,000 in subscription fees, and other enhancements spent with online solutions for the software platform CitizenServe. CitizenServe is a cloud-based platform that provides licensing, permitting, and code enforcement services. In 2019 the city entered into a service agreement with CitizenServe. It is used heavily by the building and housing staff and also any functions that touch other departments that we interact, Law Department, Economic Development, Public Works, Fire Department, as well as outside plans, examiners, City engineer. This platform was selected following a very robust competitive bidding process in partnership with the First Suburbs and five other neighboring communities.

It has now expanded. There's 12 communities the First Suburbs that are using the platform. There's certain benefits from collaborative approach, principally there's economies of scale pricing. We receive a discount of 33% off of the user subscription costs. And then the initial part of the initial rollout of the platform we saw \$71,000 in savings due to grants. And then shared services. This is actually the first time this has gone before this committee or we'll be going to Council because prior to this we've been below the procurement threshold that required Council approval. Now as we continue to expand the platform we're over that threshold. As it sits today, I'm not going to list all the services, but in the bottom of page one of your memo list all the things that we're using the platform today, licensing, permitting, a lot of our code enforcement activities, prosecution, we use it to manage the City's land bank.

All of those processes internally are now entirely electronic. We no longer have paper-based workflows, as we continue to expand the platform we're going to roll out this summer, point of sale as well as our foreclosure registration. Those are the two last big components from Building and Housing that need to be implemented in CitizenServe. As we continue to expand those services we now are at 29 users. I think we started with 17 users initially, likely adding another one or two users this year as well as going live. The cost of the city per-named user is \$1,200 per year per user, which equates to roughly \$35,000 in subscription costs this year.

There is no data storage costs, there's no other additional ongoing expenditures, those are all included in that subscription service cost. The \$35,000 has already been budgeted in this year's budget for our costs in 2023. As we transition over point of sale and a few other components from our old databases and migrate that data over there is some additional one-time costs that will range between four and \$10,000 this year. That money we already have allocated, it's in the capital budget that IT has set aside, intended to be used on this platform. In summary, we believe that this system provides essential services to the city and streamlined operations, created incredible efficiencies, reduced errors. We are requesting that the Neighborhood and Economic Development Committee recommend approval to Council to provide funding for subscription and data integration not to exceed \$45,000 and to continue to use CitizenServe and expand our use of the platform to realize further operational efficiencies and customer service enhancements. It's a complex system, I'd

entertain any questions related to the implementation of the system, how we use it, anything of that nature. Any questions?

Chair Carmella Williams:

Thank you Director and I appreciate you weaving in the answers to the questions we talked about. I saw Council Members Williams and Moore had questions, I will start with Council Member Williams and then we'll work around from there.

Anne Williams, Council Member:

Thank you Kyle for this presentation. I was just wondering if you could give us a high level overview of how this platform has met or not met your expectations, how it's really working out for the City. What do you see as highest value from the outside looking in? I know this has been a long process, getting this integrated, and I'm really impressed that you've gotten to this point. I haven't heard much about how it's actually working in the city, if you could talk about that for a little bit that'd be great.

Kyle Krewson, Director Building/Housing Dept.:

That's an excellent question and probably due for a formal presentation demonstrating how it works now that we are using it. It's like all things, there are things that it does that exceed our expectations and there's other things that we wish it could do better. But overall, by and large, it's created so many operational efficiencies. I can give some examples, for instance, processing rental licenses was a completely paper-based process previously. Renewal notices would get sent out in November-December timeframe. Then the single family, two family condos, were all due at the end of January, then the apartments were due at the end of February. We would still be processing those applications through May, it would take us that long. They would pile up so fast in such a short timeframe, it was impossible to keep up. All the receipting, everything had to be receipted individually in Munis. The whole process was a very manual labor intensive process, and we were doing all the data entry. We were taking what was written on paper forms and entering into the computers. Now that process we're able to keep up with it as they come in. At the end of the day, it's all electronic now, but our figurative inbox, our electronic inbox, is now empty at the end of the day because we're processing as fast as they're coming in. And with the customer facing portals, that creates less room for data entry error, we're not taking what somebody scratched out, trying to interpret their email address and put that in the system and so forth. The user themselves are putting it in directly. We've completely eliminated all of our paper applications, what that does from a customer service perspective is it allows, whether you're pulling a permit or you're applying for a license, you can log in and see the status. You can log in and see any documents, any violation reports that were generated if you're associated with that file. That also has reduced phone calls and emails. People want to check on status, they can go in, see the status then message the staff right there within the platform.

From a customer service perspective it provides a lot of transparency into our operations, it used to be a black hole. You'd send in your rental license application in January, come May you'd get your actual license in the mail. Now folks are getting feedback instantly. Every time we change the status of an application it generates an email letting them know what's happening. It also takes payment in the system. We used to manually enter credit card numbers over the phone. We get a lot of checks, we put those in. Now it's all built into the system. They can pay right there from the platform. It's successful, 24/7, people have access to our services, 24/7. They don't have to wait for us to be open. It does things that our old previous systems never would do before. It now tracks workflow. When somebody submits an application there's a workflow built in with approvals. It gets routed correctly before we literally rely on the piece of paper. And that piece of paper would move around office to office and often department to department to get approvals. If somebody misplaced that piece of paper we were stuck. Now that process is built in with deadlines and everybody has a dashboard. They can see what's in their inbox, what's in their task list. It's also a document manager built in.

Before we would use databases to track the process, the actual physical documents either we're paper based in the file folder, we were kind of quasi electronic. Some of the things would come in electronically. We had some electronic folders for those. Now all of the documents related to that file are in the system. Everything in the system, whether it's a system generated email, it's in the system. We can also send out batch letters. Letters that then get associated with every single file, every single property owner. It automates a lot of processes and allows us to keep closer tabs on things.

The reporting functionality is phenomenal. We're literally putting in the code violations in the system. Previously for code enforcement everything would be in a Word document completely disassociated from the database where we tracked which inspection occurred when and where it is in the process, it was a Word document. Now all of the actual individual violations live in the system. That allows us to do powerful things, like look at what's the most commonly cited violation, how many times did we cite for driveways? It's unimaginable that we would've ever been able to get to that point where we can create this, we can dig way down into the details. We're going to be using that data to drive policy decisions. Coming from building and housing, based on some discussions we've had, looking at where the needs are in the community, we have that data now because we have the violations in the system. It's a really incredible platform, it's not perfect.

It optimizes some processes in areas but makes further optimizations in other areas. All in all, it moves us into the 21st century. I joke that the systems we had before, for instance the permitting system, was state-of-the-art when we bought it and installed it in 1996, and it really hadn't been upgraded since then. This has done a lot to bring us into the 21st century. And doing this with other neighboring communities, we meet on a quarterly basis. We're now starting a bimonthly meeting with the staff, the front office staff that's working on it. They're going to be meeting regularly to see how other communities are using it and "you have the report to do that," or "you've figured out this work around to do this."

It's just been a great experience. This collaborative, regional approach, has been phenomenal. We're continuing to expand that relationship. We're bringing in county data into the system. All the county records we're shortly going to be expanding to bring in all the tax, foreclosure, tax information, foreclosure status into the system directly from the county so we can do reporting we've never been able to do. We're just starting to see the benefits of it and hope to continue that momentum and expand it for use in other city services as well.

Anne Williams, Council Member:

That was great, thank you very much.

Chair Carmella Williams:

Great question Council Member Williams and your excitement, I don't know if I've ever seen you this excited Director. CAO Chaikin, did you want to chime in?

Jeri Chaikin, CAO:

This is actually one of the reasons why we picked Kyle head of the Building and Housing Department. His skill, enthusiasm and his knowledge. It has taken a lot longer. I'm glad Earl Leiken's not here because he thought it was going to get done in a year, I think we told him two years. Kyle's right, it really is wonderful for the city to have this. Once we get everything in the system and with this new technology, I am looking forward to expanding it. There's also some exciting opportunities for the planning department next year to be automating a lot of the work they do for the Architectural Board Review and the Planning Commission. There's a lot more to come with this. I want to thank Kyle for all his work and leadership on this.

Chair Carmella Williams:

I agree, thank you Director. I know Council Member Moore had a question as well, and if I could slide in real quick. This program sounds as if it is able to meet the needs of multiple departments with at times very different focuses and at other times overlapping interest. Is the program designed that way out of the box? Or does it take a lot of internal tweaking to tailor it for each department?

Kyle Krewson, Director Building/Housing Dept.:

I put the modifications in two categories. You have configurations and customizations. Customizations is something that's custom designed specifically for a department. Everything else is configurable, 99% of what we're doing in the system is configurable. It has the overall basic framework, if it's a code enforcement activity which include inspections, if it's a license or if it's a permit, whatever the business function, if it falls into one of those three categories we can do it in the system. It's all custom configured. It's all configured, it's not like we can flip a switch and turn it on for some other function, it has to be implemented and built out. It's actually better this way, if we were to just take our paper-based processes and try to automate, we'd be trying to automate inefficiencies, it wouldn't work.

We use this as an opportunity to take a step back, look at the whole process and rebuild it from the ground up, and the system based on the functionalities and capabilities and the specific advantages of the system. As we look to use this in other departments, like the Law Department, using it now to track all their court cases. We building housing, anybody using the platform, can see the status in court and where it lives in that process. Fire Department is using it for plan reviews and entering their inspection results specifically for permits that are pulled, where there's a fire inspection component. There is opportunities for other departments that have permits. Public Works, Fire Department, they have permits that they issue.

Police Department has permits they issue. Those would be good candidates to bring into this system. Would take some time working with the departments to configure it, to do those things, it may not make sense in some areas. There will always be a need in other departments like police and fire to have their own proprietary systems to track their activities. There are some functions that would benefit from pulling over into CitizenServe. There are some systems we looked at that were really robust, that had a lot of different modules based on a finance module and a public works module. What we found in looking at those is it was hard to find one system that truly met the needs of every department. We think that this system can provide a lot of benefits to a lot of different city functions. We're starting small. We're starting with what we can control and then growing from there once we start to see those benefits. There's over 5,000 members of the community that have a user login, contractors, realtors, business owners, residents. It's really growing and growing every day.

Chair Carmella Williams:

Thank you. Council Member Moore.

Nancy Moore, Council Member:

Thank you. I wondered if you could explain a little bit more about the FSC Community Development Supplemental Grant that in your memo you say is going to link up and make business across multiple Northeast Ohio communities able to use the CitizenServe. Could tell us a little bit about that.

Kyle Krewson, Director Building/Housing Dept.:

That's a great question, I did kind of gloss over that in my presentation, it wasn't core to this discussion, I wanted to include that in the memo and I'm glad you raised that because it's showing again, the collaborative approach and how it's going to grow, expand and grow with the community, and really grow with the region. The thought here is that CitizenServe is a platform, I'm trying to think of an analogy. Each community has CitizenServe that's using it, but it's their own sandbox. I can't see what Parma or Lakewood is doing and vice versa. They can't look into any of our processes. And that's probably a good thing.

So each user, a contractor for instance, is registered to do work in Shaker they have to create a login in CitizenServe to apply for their license. If they want to go register and do business in Lakewood they have to go into Lakewood's version of CitizenServe create a whole new login and log into that system. They have, depending on which community, to log out, log back in and jump around. Same thing with our property managers who've managed hundreds of properties across Northeast Ohio. What this will do is they're going to build out a regional platform. Users would have one login and they could see everywhere where they have a contractor's license, or everywhere they manage properties they have rental licenses, and can see the status, which ones are due, which ones have open violations. Ideally the way this will work is they'll have a shopping cart, they could for instance apply, fill out a separate application for each area. That's the hope, that's the goal how that system would work. The benefit for us is there's often that we're trying to get good service on somebody we'd like to prosecute and we can't find a good local agent. Short of literally picking up the phone or sending an email to all my colleagues and surrounding cities to see if anybody else knows that person, we'd be able to see where they have a license and see what other cities they are doing business with.

Then we know specifically to reach out to those cities and say, "Can you send me out whatever contact information you have on this person." We can also see which ones are being potentially being prosecuted in other cities for code enforcement issues. It'll help from a collaborative approach being able to give us some daylight into people that we need more information on. So there's a benefit, very real benefit to the city in that way.

Chair Carmella Williams:

Excellent question. Are there any other questions from the committee members? If not is there a motion that this committee recommend approval to Council to provide subscription and data integration funding not to exceed \$45,000 to continue using CitizenServe, and expand our use of the platform to realize further operational efficiencies and customer service enhancements?

Nancy Moore, Council Member:

So moved.

Chair Carmella Williams:

Thank you Council Member Moore. Is that a second Council Member Williams? All those in favor say aye or raise your hand.

Okay thank you, and that passes. I'm sorry, are there any objections or abstentions? Okay, there are none. That is also approved by the committee unanimously.

That was the last item on our agenda tonight. If there's no other business we will stand adjourned at 6:32 PM. Thank you all for your time and participation. Have a good evening.

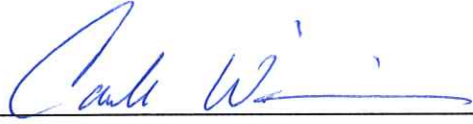
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There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:32 p.m. The next meeting will be June 14, 2023.



Carmella Williams, Chair
Neighborhood & Economic Development Committee