
Ashland City Council

Work Session Minutes
Tuesday April 8, 2008

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, Economic Development Conference Room 7:00 P.M.

Purpose: Housing/Maintenance Codes

Attendance:

Council members: Robert L. Valentine W1, Robert M. Valentine W2, Ruth Detrow, Paul Wertz

Mayor: Glen Stewart

City Engineer: Jim Cooper

Finance Director: Anna Tomasek

Roger Gordon: Building and Zoning

Parks and Recreation: Tim Clingan

Fire Department: Capt. Mark Miller

Council Clerk: Valarie Bishoff

Committee Members: Adrian Bauer

Phil Rafeld

John Chorpening

Nevin Bowers

Roger Hazen

Mike Huber

D. Keith Ballantyne

Media: T-G Travis Minnear

Public: Pat and Joseph Williams

John Miller: Real Estate

ROLL CALL: Robert L. Valentine W1, Robert M. Valentine W2, Ruth Detrow , Paul Wertz

Move to excuse Stephen Stuart by Paul Wertz, seconded by Ruth Detrow.

Ayes: Robert L. Valentine W1, Robert M. Valentine W2, Ruth Detrow, Paul Wertz

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Not performed, no flag available in room

Paul Wertz: We will be discussing Housing Codes and Maintenance and Ruth Detrow is in charge of that committee so I will let her take control of the meeting.

Ruth Detrow: We are going to go through the different committees and the kind of progress you have made. I have been working on it. I have some thoughts too. The Health Department committee, some are not here. We had planned this meeting without realizing that the Health Department is having a regular meeting tonight. So for that reason, Al Sanders is not here and Pat Donaldson is not here but I noticed the rest of the committee is here. What I have heard from Al is that they think and the people on the committee and people on the committee tell me if I make mistakes on this. They think that the Health Department guidelines and rules are sufficient and don't need to be added to or changed, is that right committee people?

Health Committee: That is correct.

Ruth Detrow: Now I doubt if any of you know but what I just learned about is E Gov, which is a computer program. It will enable us, and we already have a way of making complaints. E Gov is a very organized program which will help to follow up on complaints. I have learned just tonight that there is a CD we could get that would be searchable, right Mark?

Capt Mark Miller: Yes.

Ruth Detrow: It is searchable and it would have all of the applicable codes that our Fire Department uses. So I am thinking that the Health Department might have the same thing. Is that by any chance mentioned in your readings?

Phil Rafeld: No. Basically what we had discussed is the three areas that the Health Department covered was significant. They did a good job in obtaining and the problem they had was it always seemed to go to everybody that considered the broken sidewalk, thought that was a health issue. Their biggest problem was; it seemed like the complaints that were coming in didn't really pertain to them but when they did receive the right complaint, they were able to take care of it in a very short matter of time and we agree with that. It was just getting the complaint to the right person initially. But it seemed like as soon as they got their complaint, what they explained to us and what they gave to us as examples, they were able to take care of it in a very fashionably time.

Ruth Detrow: So except for what the citizens do as far as make their complaints, we're good?

Phil Rafeld: Yes.

Roger Hazen: The thing of it is, when they make the complaint, they don't know where it is supposed to go.

Ruth Detrow: Right, I agree, I thought that is what I was saying.

Roger Hazen: We don't know where to go, which department. The Health Department has been catching a lot of the ones that doesn't belong there that is what we were trying to say. So we need to clarify when a complaint comes in, where it goes, in which department.

Phil Rafeld: And that was the majority of our conversation. Because it seemed like they got an awful lot of complaints that didn't pertain to their department.

Ruth Detrow: I think we have some things that Mr. Miller is going to talk about, Capt. Mark Miller that will help with that and then we will listen. The complaint comes in, where does it go then?

Phil Rafeld: The problem they were having was, people misconstrue what a health issue is. They give us the three factors that the Health Department took care of. I think people like my example was, if the sidewalk was broke, if somebody thought someone was going to fall down there and get hurt, they called the Health Department thinking that was a Health issue. So they said that they received many calls like that. Or if it was an abandoned car and had rust hanging on it and children were playing in the neighborhood and they thought they would get injured by that car, they thought that was a Health Dept. problem. So I think the clarity needs to come in what the departments do and don't handle because when they did get the proper call to the Health Dept. like some people living in a condemned house and didn't have running water on the first floor. They were able to give those people assistance right away. But that was a health concern. So it is knowing what is a Health Dept. concern and knowing what belongs to various other departments.

Ruth Detrow: So it is really a matter of public education.

Phil Rafeld: Realistically, yes. Our being able to get people informed on if you have this situation, this is who you call.

Roger Gordon, Building and Zoning: I think our department has the same situation. In a day's time, we probably take 50% of our calls, and they don't belong to our department. At the same time, a large portion of those calls may even be county calls. It is a common issue throughout the city.

Phil Rafeld: It almost seems like there needs to be a Charter or something where people would know if you had this issue, or this issue, call these people. I think and here it from other committees now the same thing.

Ruth Detrow: The reason I am smiling is that is the next thing on our Agenda. Is there anything else from the committee members for the Health Committee?

Phil Rafeld: We were pretty satisfied in what they were doing because every example they gave us; they were able to back it up with action within a day or two.

Ruth Detrow: And that says a lot for the Health Department.

Mayor Stewart: May I ask, what happens to the calls that comes to Engineering or goes to the Health Dept. and they had gotten to the wrong area?

Phil Rafeld: The Health Dept. told us that was one of the biggest problems that they had. They had to right it down and then they happen to know whom to contact but it took a lot of time, because their services are almost like an operator. They are taking a complaint and trying to get it to the right department. And they said on a few occasions, and this was just a minor thing. But they said they didn't know which department to go to.

Mayor Stewart: But they do forward them?

Phil Rafeld: Yes they do.

Mayor Stewart: And they do tell the complainant, if they don't know where to send it, that they will get back with them and get information?

Phil Rafeld: Yes.

Roger Gordon: That is basically what we do. We find homes for all of those calls, 95-96% of all the calls. We hear back once in a while from somebody that doesn't find and we will make an effort to redirect that call someplace else.

Phil Rafeld: They told us that they took the name and phone number and yet they couldn't get a person for them, that they would call them back and let them know so they did not leave them hanging. But they spent a lot of time being an operator.

Ruth Detrow: Which is taking a lot of time that may be if we can figure out how to do this, we could avoid that.

Phil Rafeld: That was the conclusion of our group. We were satisfied with what they were doing. It is just trying to figure a way to get them in touch with the right people when calls came in.

Roger Gordon: When we get those kinds of calls, we are depending on who has the most experience and who knows to make sure if there is other office staff in the office that they get to hear that conversation as such to if that call reoccurs, and it is somebody else, it will simplify how to direct that call.

Ruth Detrow: When Captain Miller and I discussed what the Fire Department does; one thing he came up with is, he will pass these out.

Capt Mark Miller: I apologize because I don't know that we will have enough copies. I will send as many as I can around. One concern was identifying by both subcommittees and the customers of the city was directing calls. The first sheet gives you just a very basic idea of where complaints could possibly go and these are open to additions or any corrections. We can expand on this to include examples of a basic idea of where it should go and this would be available on the city's website and also in office reference materials that anyone could have access to. It gives you some general idea and like I said we can expand on the contents of this. That was one of the main concerns that all of the subcommittees voiced were where do complaints go. And then once they get there; if it is not the right place, how does it get transferred. And this is at the customer level where this is basic information. The second page I will pass around; it is an example of what kind of adds to the piece of the puzzle here and it would kind of flow under that first sheet. This is a copy of the Fire Departments protocol and what we do once a complaint reaches us. So what would happen is you would have underneath that initial sheet that I handed out you could kind of visualize. There should be three other sheets that in detail explain the processes so that mid or upper level supervisors or folks that monitor these activities, Councilmen or Division Directors can respond to a question and where is the action at; at this point. So that you can kind of track where it is going or what needs to be done to address the complaint. So that would kind of fit underneath the first section that you have in front of you there. Each department would have a similar, probably procedure that they follow that details where their work goes or how it terminates finally at someone's office. Then again that would be open for additions or corrections from all of the various departments. But this should give you an idea of the complexity of these issues that we are dealing with. The first sheet is for basically just the customer of the city, even office staff to refer to. The second sheet is more detailed to look at what goes behind the scenes to make all of this work. So you can kind of track where it has gone or where it has been. The part of that also the city has ground work laid for is the e gov site. It is basically an Internet survey and e-mail tool. It can be available on all of the departments websites, the city of Ashland website. But if you have a complaint, you can click on basically a link and it directs that to the appropriate agency. Once it reaches that agency, if the complaint is not dealt with in a timely manner, it is forwarded up to the next level. At the Fire Department, if I received a complaint, if it is not handled or at least responded to within three days, then there is a notification that is sent to the chief so that he knows that it is something that we have that hasn't been addressed so it gives some accountability. So the mechanisms are in place to deal with some of these problems. Where we don't have a good grasp of it is how it fits in the big picture and if we can complete something similar for the other departments that kind of fits in or fills in the gaps here, when you receive complaints, if you are on that end of trying to work through the problems, you can have a very good idea of where a solution can be found. For the customers, they want something simple with examples of where do I go to have my issue addressed, so all they would ever see is that first page with maybe some examples. Any of the phone numbers or websites could be hyperlinked so that you click on them and they take you to the appropriate agency or it opens up a window that will automatically file a complaint for you. For those who would not have access to a computer, there are always phone numbers that are available too. And if you receive a call and aren't sure where to direct it to, you could refer back to the sheet and have some general idea of how to process that call from the customer.

Mike Huber: How many departments in the City currently use something like this?

Capt. Mark Miller: It is a part of Quality Initiative that puts on paper what you do for a process. I know the city has lots of departments working under the Quality Initiative.

Ruth Detrow: That isn't yet is it?

Capt. Mark Miller: It is software that is commercially available. Most of the departments probably have access to it because it comes in an Office Suite; whether they use it or not depends on who happens to know it.

Mayor Stewart: Tim, do you use the flow chart?

Tim Clingan: No. Not this sophisticated, no.

Mayor Stewart: Anna, do you use a flow chart in Finance?

Anna Tomasek: We just have a basic flow chart.

Capt. Mark Miller: And it is something that is even common in just brainstorming ideas. Somebody could jot down what their process is on paper and someone else can translate that into a flow chart from the software so it makes sense visually for someone to look at on the web page or in a hand out or leaflet.

Mayor Stewart: I would suggest through the Quality Initiative, all of the departments know what their jobs are and would have the resource already to put it in a format tool like this. But has that tool been developed as similar to this, in many cases obviously not.

Ruth Detrow: But it is something that is great.

Mayor Stewart: It is a wonderful pattern.

Ruth Detrow: I know there are some people who say, I don't have a computer or I wouldn't touch my sons computer or I have no interest, or I use my computer for e-mail. You can make a telephone call. I am sure Valarie would like to hear from them, she can put it into the computer on e-gov, because I know she uses it. She uses it a lot. But also our public library, I have talked to them. They would be glad to take the time to show you exactly how to get on e gov and while I was talking to him on the phone, one of their reference librarians, he did just exactly that. He got on the e gov to make sure it would work. He was a little concerned because they have blocks on some of their e-mailing things at the library. So he went ahead and did it, and the Mayor got it and Val got it. But they will take the time, if they are really rushed right then, they might have to ask you to wait a little bit. You might want to call first, but those computers in the library are for everyone's use. And if you don't have access to a computer, you can go in there and learn something new, which doesn't ever hurt any of us. I have some copies and I am going to pass these around so you can take a glance at them. These are some things our tech guy ran off having to do with how to use e gov and some samples of them.

On the Fire Department, is there more to report besides that? You are satisfied with what you have?

Capt. Mark Miller: The process that we have in place works. We can do everything we currently do that ultimately, you can see the ends, by the flow chart, with the Law Director. As long as we do everything that

we can, I think we are satisfied with that. I am familiar with the e-gov system because we use that also and it is something that could be available to anyone that uses it whether it is the city's customers. It will work even if folks don't use the computer but they use the telephone. It is on the receiving end of the complaint, they can generate the e gov report to whatever department it might go to. . Some people are skeptical of the system because not everyone uses a computer, but I think any of the city employees or anyone in a position where they are answering phones or taking messages and things like that can use fairly easily. So it doesn't necessarily have to be just the complainant who initiates the e-gov. It could be any of the administrative staff or Secretary or the Councilmen. Everyone has access to it. The tools we have in place for the Fire Department, work for us. It is just how they work with the other departments I think is where we all need to have an idea of how the big picture works.

Ruth Detrow: Is there anything else from any other members of that committee?

Committee: No.

Ruth Detrow: Okay, Building and Zoning. You want to start with comments?

Roger Gordon: You want to start with a Summary? We met with the Chair people and we met with Richard P. Wolfe, Director of Law and I think we all have kind of come to the same surmise as to the fact, the tool we have presently, if we are going to attempt to use it in a fashion that is more accommodating for maintenance; we need to make some alterations or changes to it. I think that was the end result with our discussions with Rick. We have the one and two family codes as far as the dwelling codes but it doesn't address all of the things. It is not written in the fashion where it is easily enforceable or easily prosecutable in the court system without making some benefits to it. I think Rick is open to that as long as we know what changes we want to make to it. This goes back to Council as Council feels what the items need to be.

Paul Wertz: We need to do something to change it to get something done. Those pictures I showed you, that has been going on for years. We need something done. It gets worse every year. The house deteriorates.

Mike Huber: The document you are currently working with was drafted in 1982. That is 26 years old. It certainly needs some updating; there is no question about that. Roger did a very thorough review of 24 different communities in the State of Ohio. He actually got copies of their housing codes, maintenance codes of that nature, some more restricted than others. But it brings it up to more current today's language. As Roger indicated, it will give the legal department a little more teeth to be able to move forward and address some issues that are out there. I did a quick scan through of all of those 25 different maintenance codes and Roger is correct, what we currently have is not maintenance; it is building and zoning codes. That is it. It doesn't address this. Of those 25, I looked at 14; you see language throughout these to talk about maintaining property values or addressing things such as does not constitute a blighting factor for adjoining property owners. We don't have language that protects. I think that is something that needs to be added.

Ruth Detrow: If I could ask members of the committee; are there specific plans that need to be done, keeping in mind that we may have to revisit this two or three years or whenever times get a little better. In my view, we would be unwise to expect a great deal of improvement of properties considering how tough times are right now. But there are certainly some things that can be done and our laws cover more than you would think; for example, I have heard people talk quite a bit about yards that are full of junk, boards and siding that has fallen off, a few shingles and bags of trash, etc. And believe it or not that is already addressed in our Codified Ordinances. The number is 521.08 and it says no person shall place, throw, deposit, permit to be deposited or swept into or upon any property which he owns, occupies or otherwise is in charge of and it goes into the things you can't; junk, garbage, refuse, awful animal carcasses. That covers it. So what we

need I think is again going back to if that is happening next door to your house, you need to file a complaint with the city because, we cannot afford to hire a new person to run around and do this. We have some investigators who can follow up. Capt. Miller I know does some checking on things for fire codes but again I am speaking just to myself. I can't see that the city; we are having tough times just like all of the people of our city are and I can't see us hiring; I can't see the Mayor hiring someone.

Mayor Stewart: I can't see Council supporting me to hire. I have a little bit different view I think Friday, there are those who have lived in their own homes, resident-owned homes, owner-occupied homes, that I believe there are some people in very dire straits but that does not keep them from keeping trash out of their yard, it does not prohibit them from keeping the weeds down. Those aesthetic things like that. Now if they have to re-side their house, that is a pretty big hit. On the other hand, there are those that; and Adrian Bauer is sitting beside me, but I am going to throw this out anyway; there are those who are in business renting homes and they are in it for profit and I am not sure but what they shouldn't be charged with maintaining those businesses a little more aesthetically, in a more appropriate way. How do I tell Adrian you have to do yours, but Paul you don't have to do yours? I don't know how to do that. But I think there are two different circumstances we might be dealing with, but I don't know how to deal with it.

Mike Huber: It differentiates between owner occupied and residential properties. There is the city of Athens in here that is quite specific about properties, and I know it is speaking directly to College students as tenants and properties. As far as exterior maintenance, that would be a part of it.

Ruth Detrow: One other thing I did as I was working on this project. I talked to the C.H.I.P. people. When I talked to them it was a couple of months ago, they were out of money. They may have been funded again by now; they are funded every two years.

Anna Tomasek: We are in a Grant cycle right now.

Ruth Detrow: So they have money right now?

Anna Tomasek: We are taking applications and we are processing in the C.H.I.P. Program right now.

Mayor Stewart: Houses that are not occupied and owned by, I will pick on somebody, Countryside Mortgage in Dallas Texas; tell them to cut the grass and you just as well might as well talk to the clock up there. Now Mansfield has addressed that in the past week. They now put, if the resident or owner does not keep their yard cut properly, it is \$100.00 dollars flat rate to go out and then so much an hour per person that it takes to clean it up and then it goes to the taxes or the lien, I am not sure which, it was just on the radio this past week. They upped it to where it makes it pretty darn respectable; you are going to know you got a hit if you do not keep your yard cleaned up. I don't know that that is what Council wants but number one, it takes us a long time to respond to high weeds, I know that, these Councilman all know that; and I am not sure exactly why, if it is manpower or what it may be. It does take sometimes a long time to react to high weeds.

(Unknown speaker) I think she was referring to junk cars.

Mayor Stewart: If it is unlicensed, it is a violation. If it has a current license on it, it is a whole different story.

Robert M. Valentine W2: Yeah, but there isn't anything that addresses boats. We went through that before too.

Ruth Detrow: Lets specifically say what things are not addressed that we want to see addressed.

Mike Huber: Mayor, I might want to add when our committee met, our subcommittee met, it was back in December in the Law Directors office. I took some notes and Rick said he purposely wanted to look at his department and do a self study on past practices, so I don't know where he is at regarding that but, he said that was something that he personally thought that he could take a look at and see if there are ways to do that to move along the job a little quicker.

Ruth Detrow: It just seems as though we shouldn't have to go through the court system every time we want someone to mow their lawn. It seems as though that there ought to be a way that if you pass something, that is a blanket, if your lawn is higher than this and we already have that. Does it not have to go all the way to the Court system before they can be forced to do it? That is where it is a problem.

Roger Gordon: I think what Glen is talking about with Mansfield, if you look at 547.00 in the Codified, it addresses it as a 5 day notice turn-a-round but it involves spending out of the city coffers as far as if we want to get into the lawn mowing business.

Robert M. Valentine W2: You have to make it like Glen said, for 50 bucks somebody is going to say come and mow my yard; you know what I am saying? You got to make it to a point where they say well "I can't afford that!"

Mayor Stewart: Where it is a penalty, not a service.

Robert M. Valentine W2: That is what they were doing in Cleveland; the people were just letting it go and paying \$100.00 bucks because they couldn't get anyone else to do it for \$100.00; it was like a jungle.

Ruth Detrow: It should be more, a little more costly at least than what you could go out and hire someone to do it because we want you to go out and hire someone to do it.

Roger Gordon: Mansfield's is like a surcharge. \$100.00.

Ruth Detrow: As Roger said, we already have that the trees and weeds can be removed by the city, but what we don't have is they can be removed next week by the city because they are at a certain height.

Phil Rafeld: Just out of curiosity, if you made this Ordinance, whom are you going to get to mow the lawn then? Are we talking having the Street Department doing it?

Robert M. Valentine W2: You can contract for somebody to do it and it wouldn't even involve our forces. It would be something to be left up to the administration to make it happen. In house people or contract people, it is up to Administration to get it done, after it is found by the proper process that something needs to be done. I was on the Councilman's side of the fence for years and I know what a drag it is to try and get those things done.

Robert M. Valentine W2: Those are a lot of my calls. I have gotten probably 25 calls in the last year on high grass and they all have eventually been taken care of, but the problem of it is; I go to the house if there is somebody living there; the one guy said "my mower is broken"; I said "there are a lot of places in town who will fix it". A lot of them we can handle and that is part of our job I think. You get a lot of calls, but a lot of that stuff you can handle; just go to the house and talk to them. It is like this, would you rather talk to me or would you rather talk to the Law Director? Rick is a nice guy but not that nice. I have had a lot of calls and I

go to the house and talk to people; that is part of what I think I am supposed to do. Then if they don't want to talk to me then I give them to Rick; or if they have a big dog, Rick gets them.

Ruth Detrow: We need to have appropriate legislation so that lawns can be mowed without having to go through the Court system in a timely manner.

Mayor Stewart: And it was said, Rick was going to review his operation to see how it is done in past practices.

(Unknown Speaker) What about these Church groups that you were talking about that were volunteering to do this labor?

Ruth Detrow: I went to the Pump House, this was before the fire; we were talking and they made a point of this too, we are not talking about people who are Landlords, people who are making a living with these houses; we are talking about someone, an older person, or someone who is not physically able in some way to for example: shingle a roof, or a porch roof. At the Pump House, I was received very kindly. Mark Holsinger, Glen Spriller; they are both people who work maintenance type projects at Pump House and they said that they actually have people who are looking for volunteer work to do. Now it would have to be and maybe we could just leave it to them. They want to help people who are trying to help themselves and who need help. They are not trying to make life easier for people who are in the business of renting properties, that is not their goal. They also suggested Park Street Brethren; another possible Church, and I haven't talked to them yet, but it seems as though we have a lot of good people in Ashland who would be willing to help those who have a need and just aren't able to handle it themselves. Now the people who go out and throw trash into the backyard and close the back door and never look at it again; they might get help from these folks but I wouldn't even want to ask them to. It is not that we want to ask them to do things for people that people are perfectly capable of doing for themselves.

D. Keith Ballantyne: Don't you find that most people that are not able to do those things find a way to get it done? It is those that are negligent about keeping up their property that you need to address more than the ones that physically cannot do it themselves; those people usually have a desire and find a way to get it done.

Ruth Detrow: The only thing is, we are talking about the law here too. We have to treat everyone equally and when you are in that situation, you can't say well this person is just being negligent and this person is trying. We can't leave a judgment call like that.

D. Keith Ballantyne: Isn't it the ones that are negligent that really are the problem? More than someone who is physically unable to do some of those things; they usually hire it done, or have a friend do it or relatives and family.

Ruth Detrow: If we could make a law for the good people, the ones who are trying hard, and another law for the other people who are perfectly capable of getting it done but just chooses not to bother. But what we have to do is make a law that applies to people on an equal basis. So that is where people like Pump House and I don't know, they had a fire and they might be using their people to the fullest extent now. They might have to back out and I certainly would understand that. But I think that there are other people who would help. If the law says that you have to paint your house because there is almost no paint left on it and you need help and you are living in your own house, it is not like a landlord, which he would be doing for you. From what I have been able to find out, there will be people who will be able to help. But it has to be that situation. I hope we are not going to get into any kind of difficulty with the legality of this.

Mayor Stewart: I would guess, Ruth, that there are enough flagrant violations to address for the next several years that we will not have to worry about those borderline cases, seriously, I really think that there are. When we get down to: Is the grass four inches or five inches high, we won't need this anymore. I think there is enough, trashy, bad situations that it may not even be a decision that will have to be made in the very near future. I could be wrong.

Ruth Detrow: We have heard about one or two places where the person actually can't handle the work and if we say the work has to be done because the people down the street have to do it and the people next door have to do it, why then we have to say that you have to do it too.

Mayor Stewart: And maybe we call the Pump House and say; " We've got you a real customer".

Ruth Detrow: That is what I am thinking.

Robert M. Valentine W2: But also if we do something to show that we are serious, you are going to have people go "Uh Oh, I better do it before they come after me!" You are going to get a certain amount of people who are going to do it just because they don't want anybody coming to their house, so well I better do this. It might be kind of a domino affect anyway.

D. Keith Ballantyne: The letter could say how to accomplish that.

Nevin Bowers: The one thing that probably needs attention is the Aesthetics. It needs to be addressed. I think if you start sorting out people, you are going to get into trouble. Everyone should be treated as equals. If you have that indigent person who can't do it, then you just process that.

Mike Huber: Many of the communities have adopted a percentage of bare wood or exposed unpainted services anywhere in the range of 15-25% and/or no gutters or downspouts that are not functioning.

Nevin Bowers: Our Building Code is fine. It is the Aesthetics part that is lacking. Also the other thing is; where do you go for the complaint?

Ruth Detrow: Okay, How much paint and I think we are going to have to probably do it in a percent, somehow.

(Unknown speaker) Well I am just saying that there are some communities that have that in their codes. That is just the decision somebody will have to make at some point in time if that is the direction you are going.

Mayor Stewart: Two and one half years ago, Ruth called Solon and they have that and they enforce it. A little different situation from a community per capita income.

Roger Gordon: Most communities that have a Maintenance type code have an Appeals Board and you almost have to have an Appeals Board to be able to make it work, because if not, somebody will put your tax with it. You have to have that to sort through the people.

Ruth Detrow: So we have to have legislation for an Appeals board, we need something to put more teeth into the yard care; we need legislation that says you have to have gutters or downspouts. Aesthetics is a very general term.

Roger Gordon: There are actually structures that are not designed to have gutters and there is one on Cottage Street. It has a French Drain around the structure. They would really be offended if they had to install gutters.

Ruth Detrow: And if you knew that, it wouldn't even come up.

Phil Rafeld: I think that might come up when somebody says, how come he doesn't have a gutter? But what I am saying is, not everybody would know what a French drain is. So if the average person driving down the road doesn't see them as having a drain, they're wondering.

Ruth Detrow: Let's hope they ask and that may solve the problem. Okay, gutters and downspouts, mowing the lawn; do we want to say anything about painting?

Nevin Bowers: That is a big factor of aesthetics

Ruth Detrow: This is the committee that has been studying this more than anything else. I am not saying that Council is just going to pass everything we say; but we're certainly listening.

Phil Rafeld: Let me just say, you know 20 some years ago when Thomas Drive was put in, and I used to drive down through there; that looked like a pretty nice area of town. I mean everybody kept their houses up. The first owners, you can drive through there, they were pretty proud of their property and what they had; when I drive down through there today, I can tell the people who has been there for the duration vs the people who are just moving into the neighborhood because just the whole aesthetics changed down through the neighborhood. It doesn't look really as curb appealing as it once did. So I guess I am interested to see how you could monitor something like that because it is still a good neighborhood, it is just you can tell who has been there forever, got their house looking sharp. They have updated their doors, their windows, roofs; they are always painted clean and neat looking. Then there are the new ones that come in and are bank rolled right to the end of their bankroll and they probably won't go out and put much paint in it anymore; so I am curious to see how that can be worked out.

Robert M. Valentine W2: As far as I am concerned; we probably wouldn't have to go there for 20 years; some of these other neighborhoods, that is the last street I am worried about. That's called age brother; look at me, I look a heck of a lot different than I did 30 years ago.

Roger Hazen: I have been out of town for 35 years and have just moved back. The other day I drove on W. 10th Street between Cottage and Orange Streets. That use to be the dumpiest street in town when I was a kid. I drove down through there yesterday; there are three houses on that street that need some help; the rest of them don't need anything. They look great for an old section of town, for an old street that was all run down; there is one trailer that needs to be moved out and then there are two houses that need paint; but the rest of the street is on their way up, not down and that is what we are here for I think. But this is what we want something to take care of those two houses that need paint and fixed up but the rest of the neighborhood is coming up so we need the help to boost the other two.

Mayor Stewart: The Grants that we have been signing for Home Maintenance; those are owner-occupied homes and if some of these maintenance issues need to be addressed, that is what that is for, is it not?

Anna Tomasek, Finance: Yes. It is based upon income; they have to go through an application process; but there are three programs. The majority of the program is called owner rehab and basically they will take

a section of the house and rehab it, up to approximately \$36,000.00 dollars per house and I believe we have to do six of those in a year in the Grant and the remaining money goes for emergency home repair whether it is putting in a new furnace, a new roof. And the other third part of the program is for those who want to buy a house and it pays for the closing costs of the house as well as rehab.

Ruth Detrow: And you have money now?

Anna Tomasek: Correct. \$550,000.00 dollars and it is broken down in to those three programs that I have just talked about.

Robert M. Valentine W2: Have we being doing those though?

Paul Wertz: Yes. Every year.

Anna Tomasek: Yes.

Mayor Stewart: That is what she spoke of was out of money last year. It is not city money. It is Federal money.

Robert M. Valentine W2: Do they have any that I can look at before and after? I mean \$36,000.00 dollars is a lot of money to put in a house.

Anna Tomasek: The County also receives this. The city gets \$550,000.00 and the county gets it too. For 2 ½ years.

Mayor Stewart: There are some bucks there. It isn't going to clean up the whole community but there is some money there that would help low to moderate income if they make the application and meet the criteria.

Anna Tomasek: We approximately do about six to eight home repairs, emergency repairs; we do approximately six rehabs and three down payment programs per year.

Adrian Bauer: Do you have to spend that much money per house? Can you do ten houses and spend less? So you could do more houses and spend less?

Anna Tomasek: \$36,000.00 dollars is the max per house.

Mayor Stewart: You could do four \$9000.00 dollars.

Ruth Detrow: So that will be a great help.

Adrian Bauer: Has anyone said anything about the abandoned houses around town?

(Speaker unknown) We did talk about that and Rick Wolfe shared with them; they have been successful when dealing with some of the situations.

Roger Gordon: We have taken down houses in the past; it is not an easy process. Something that is not done overnight.

(Speaker Unknown): Are you currently working on any of the existing ones?

Roger Gordon: Just today in fact. It just depends; you pick and choose as to location and condition; we certainly don't want to take down ten a year unless we have to. That will eat into our housing stock. I had seen a news article the other day, that the city of Columbus is looking at that they have over two thousand residences in take down status condition and all of last year they only managed to take down 20 houses in the city of the size of Columbus.

Ruth Detrow: That would be a long legal process.

Roger Gordon: It is about a 6-month process.

Ruth Detrow: I hate to be a stick in the mud but let's go back to the things you think; especially to the committee of houses.

Roger Gordon: Also these maintenance codes have an exterior surface section and that will address as to not only paint, but it is deciding as to stain as to some type of application that is going to not allow decay to happen. The one that I am looking at right now is in the city of Berea, they have done it in a nice fashion and kind of a summary as to their actual code. They talked 15%.

Mike Huber: Ruth, what I handed you there was something that had come out of Fremont. Broken windows and stairs and railings; you know it is all in these codes. This book has a lot of examples of that. I don't know if the purpose of this meeting is to get that detailed, I don't think it is. It is Council and somebody's decision to go to that next step and adopt some language with that.

Ruth Detrow: You know I want some specific things.

Mike Huber: I am here representing Ashland Board of Realtors, so I guess I have to say; we obviously believe saving property values, I think that is important. What procedure do they use to make it work?

Roger Gordon: Each have their own situation.

John Miller: They had experienced that up here. We sold a house up there which was a bank-owned house and they put a lien on the property because they went out and mowed the two acres once or twice. Most of those repossessed houses will have people who will come and take care of them on a regular basis, keeping the lawn mowed, trash them out. But put a lien on the house for lawn mowing situation, the lien is where the title company will catch you. You can't keep it here in Ashland and expect the title company to, it is at the courthouse.

Roger Gordon: Like the demolition process we are talking about; for us to initiate that, we actually have to file an affidavit with the county that we are doing it. They realize if somebody comes along that we are in that process. There is a timetable on that too. You just can't initiate that process without doing that.

John Miller: So Ashland has most of the codes there, they just need to follow through on the procedure and fines on how to do it.

Roger Gordon: We need some other suggested things as far as the maintenance aspects of it because we don't have the aesthetics issues within our one and two family such that is enforceable. If it is a light safety issue, if it involves occupants. We just don't have an exterior situation that involves those items that I hear Council talking about that are issues with the neighbors and property values as far as Mike suggested.

(Unknown Speaker): We had a foreclosed house beside us for 18 months and the only time the lawn got mowed or the leaves got raked up was by the neighbors. The bank wasn't going to do anything.

John Miller: Well the ones we worked a lot of times they had people come in and trash them out and they are supposed to mow them every three weeks or once a month; granted some of them do fall through, but most of the neighbors call the realtor and say you are supposed to mow this grass out there. And that is not true. We generally call the bank and say the grass hasn't been mowed. Then they send somebody.

(Unknown speaker): Once it gets to a realtor. I mean that house sat there without a realtor for almost that entire time.

(Unknown speaker): Some of them set two years.

Capt. Mark Miller: One of the next things that has to be done by the committee is whether it needs to be re-organized now into specifically feeling that a maintenance code; the example provided by Roger was over 25 different codes as examples. I am sure that a committee could find three acceptable versions of each different category, whether it is aesthetics or painting or yard mowing. Have different ones to choose from and ultimately present that to the Council or the Mayor to say which one of these is best suited for our update? I think that the fact that the current code is 26 years old; it makes it outdated a little bit by our current standards. So with that being an example; I wouldn't think it that difficult to come up with some examples that would be acceptable. That you could have two to three to choose from and basically okay and number two sounds good; number three sounds good and compile this into one new package that is an update. It is a big step, but the information I think is out there, the resource that we have just in the book I think is something that could be put together in fairly short order because of all of these examples.

Roger Gordon : Mix and match also

Capt. Mark Miller: Exactly. It doesn't have to be like; we are going to accept Riverside property code. It could be one piece out of Riverside, one piece out of Tiffin, one piece out of Mt. Vernon. The combination, it looks like they have similar size of towns.

Roger Gordon: What we were trying to do was compile them by population.

(Unknown speaker): How about like concentrating on one item like the mowing of the lawns because that will affect everything else because somebody is not going to let their house run down and keep their lawn all mowed perfectly nice.

Rob Ward: I think you are not going to get this solved. You have everything set up except for maintenance. I think you had that committee bring some recommendations. You have three issues. You have the house on the outside, which could be gutters, windows, roofs, painting, the whole thing. You have the yard commissions. There is another issue in that things that are stored in the yard, like boats, trailers, lawn mowers, all kinds of things. You can at least lay them down as categories and bring them to the Mayor and Council and Council may say you know what; I can live with this, but I can't live with this. At least we have down ideas of what other communities are doing and there is a fourth issue that I am seeing when you drive by there is just junk everywhere. At least address those areas and have some teeth behind each one of those and Council or Roger whoever has to enforce it can do so. You have to be careful about treating people differently

Capt. Mark Miller: I think we have a focus though of the direction that you can have as an overall idea of the scheme that everyone is on board with, now it is just a matter of focusing over several meetings you could resolve a number of different areas I think that everyone could agree on.

Once people see that the City is serious about this and there are a couple of people who have to do it, that is when people will start doing a lot more in the community.

Robert M. Valentine W2: I have seen a lot of people out there putting new sidewalk in. They are figuring why not do it now, they won't come and get me. Mr. Wolfe won't send me a letter.

Pat Williams: I have a question. I am not on a committee either. But I live next door to somebody that it is not that they're not able to do it, it is that they are too lazy to do it like taking the trash out. Letting it get like that and then they have someone come in and mow it. They don't mow it right and they leave all this grass lying all over the sidewalk, all over the yard. They don't trim. The shrubs grow up into the lines and I don't know whereabouts you live, but I am sure you wouldn't want to live beside something like that and also I am planning on selling my house next year; what happens if someone comes in and says well you have a nice house, but I don't want to live next door to this. Then what happens? I am stuck with the house because nobody wants to buy it because everyone is afraid of hurting somebody's feelings because of a law. Well I have lived bedside this for years and I am totally fed up with it.

Robert M. Valentine W2: Drive out West Main Street, go past the two ball fields, past Yoder's alignment; you have a blue house that sets on the hill; that is my neighborhood. It is worse than the house you are talking about. You couldn't find the mailbox or their trash bags. They were in the front. I mean the weeds were six foot high. It took us how long to get those weeds cut and they have trees and bushes growing into their front windows.

Rob Ward: If Roger or whoever is in charge of that goes out and puts a lot of pressure on them but they won't do it.

Robert M. Valentine W2: You and I would think this was not nice. We do need teeth here. I got into this a little deeper than most people cause I found out that the people who live here, and I wont mention any names, they use to live with the guys mother and she got tired of it and she bought them this house to get them out, so we wouldn't go after them, we went after the lady that got them out of her house. So we would be really getting to the root of the problem.

Joseph William: That is what happened at this place. The mom and step dad bought a new house out on Rt. 60 so they give it to the kid to live here, he takes the garbage outside, he might set it out once a month, but if you call the Health Dept. he will do it two weeks in a row, he will set it out.

Robert M. Valentine W2: I remember that on 9th Street.

Pat Williams: What I am saying, in a case like that, he has been told, he has been warned, so that is the person that should be fined.

Robert M. Valentine W2: It ought to be progressive discipline.

Pat Williams: That's right. For somebody who is not able to do it or somebody who is able to do it and how am I supposed to handle it? Is there a law that if I go to sell my house and somebody says I don't want

to move next door to that; is there any kind of a law that protects me? I think something should be done about that too.

You have to be able to enforce it or you are wasting your time.

Ruth Detrow: Okay the committee, and I am wondering if they want more help. Do you want more people?

I think you almost need a new committee that may want to reform.

Ruth Detrow: Actually we have accomplished some things. We know that our Fire Code works, we know that our Health Dept. works. We have gotten rid of that as stuff that has to be done or has to be worried about but we need specifics.

Jim Cooper: We need to get information from Rick on his analysis that he said he was going to go through that might mention it.

Roger Gordon: Originally when we put these cross sections of the different communities together and gave them to Council and give them a chance to look at these and maybe even suggest, select some of the things they thought were really pertinent. Some things they might want to include. If you still have those, now would be the time to put them to use. I will probably have to generate some more of these for the committee members because the one I have floating around is the only spare that we have.

Ruth Detrow: Those who are already on a committee, do you want to stay?

1. Roger Gordon
2. Roger Hazen
3. Mike Huber
4. Jim Cooper
5. D. Keith Ballantyne

You have the knowledge already built up from studying this. The consensus is that we need a couple more people at least.

Some of the committees may combine to deal with task-oriented jobs now. The subcommittees worked well to find the problems, now the committees come back together and work for a solution.

Mayor Stewart: Capt. Miller, you said in terms of like the outward, or the building aesthetics focused on that, will focus on grounds maintenance.

Capt. Miller: I think the subcommittee can be, they start to look through the different examples that Roger provided, and maybe with his direction get a list of different things that we think are acceptable examples to update the dwelling codes and I think everybody that was in various subcommittees want to be involved in this new committee somehow. I don't think it is going to make; we are not done with anybody. It is just using the committees now in a larger group level.

Roger Gordon: It is 65 or 75% of the Maintenance codes that are in that document have sections that apply to grass and junk and they may slightly overlap some of the sections we have and Rick may have a problem with that and he may not want it in that particular document but they are included in a lot of this communities maintenance codes.

Rob Ward: They spend months doing this and then it comes somewhere and it just dies. The Law Director should be on there because if he is not willing to step behind it and say I am going to enforce this, then it will be a waste of time too. Council needs to support something like this.

Roger Gordon: A cross section of people like that allows that Council person to go back and Rick go back to his staff and it has to be that group of people because so many times when we come up with a plot, Rick is the last guy to get it, sometimes he is not really anxious to be the last guy on the list.

Ruth Detrow: So the first step is to talk to Rick and get an analysis of past practices, which he has already started? What about those of you who actually; Fire Dept. committee, Health Dept committee, your jobs on that really are done except for making sure that we have for example the CD, the searchable CD so people can look at that. I am hoping the Health Dept will have that too. I think we are just about done for tonight and I think I would like those of you who are interested in joining this and I will join this one and any of the rest of you. I have heard some good suggestions here. Let us know if you are on the committee before you leave.

1. Phil Rafeld
2. Nevin Bowers
3. Ruth Detrow
4. Capt. Mark Miller
5. Richard P. Wolfe II

John Miller: I agree with you Robert M. Valentine, maybe I have been naïve about this, when you are the Councilman for your Ward, people are supposed to call you if you have a problem, so why not all the Council people know where to send these complaints. You wouldn't have to hire anyone else to answer those questions. As long as the general public knows.

Robert M. Valentine W2: I get calls from all the Wards.

That is part of the idea though that is part of the document that Councilman can use for a reference if they do have a complaint.

Robert M. Valentine W2: Where I work, I work down at ODOT. We have a program called SIMS and when a complaint call comes in, it goes into our computer system and its routed and it can only go like 48 hours and something better be done on it or it pops up on the Director's computer that nothing has been done and then whomever the complaint was directed to is in deep stuff. So it is a computer program and it comes in and it is directed to where it needs to be directed and you have to do something. Once it is in the system, it can't be deleted. There has to be something done.

Educating the general public to where to call is going to be a real task. If we publish it enough in the Ashland Times Gazette, perhaps and other places, any problems you have, call your Councilman and they will tell you where to take your complaints.

Robert M. Valentine W2: I know the guys will say, don't have it, you know. But the first year I was here, I think I had 127 calls. My wife writes down every one and I call them and I always make sure that I get back to them. You have to do that. People want you to call them back. And then when you find out what you can and cannot do for them, they want you to call them back and tell them what you can do. Which it gives you credibility.

Roger Gordon: It is not just a city problem, is a county problem also because the first number we teach anybody that comes into our office is 419-289-0000 for the county because the people in the county have no idea of where to call. We are the first number in the index in the yellow pages since I have been trying to go under zoning for years but they want it under building. So in an average day, Monday this week, I would say that we took 25 to 35 county calls in one day. We spent a minute or two with each one of those people to help them redirect. If the county had some sort of resource that people in the county new. That poor gal at the switchboard, I am almost in love with the lady because she has to just have all of the headaches that there is.

John Miller: The Board of Realtors is kind of working on that idea of and we have talked to Tim Cooper who is the new Regional County Planning Commissioner and we run into a lot of zoning problems in the townships and Tina adverse to people calling in and asking questions about it and will transfer that question to the township trustee where it belong.

Roger Gordon: I spent ten minutes with a lady this evening that was looking for Orange Township but her problem resounded enough that I felt like I had to stay on the phone with her to help her solve her problem even though she was going to call Orange Township before she got done.

Why not have in the phone book, you have all of the city departments listed, why not have a number for complaints and whoever answers that phone can direct that call to where it should go.

Robert M. Valentine W2: That would be another full time job and I don't think the Mayor is going to hire anyone.

Ruth Detrow: We could direct them all to the Mayor's office.

Mayor Stewart: I personally think that the county system of having a phone number to call the county is great. And the person that receives that call, you should be in love with her if she handles these calls as I think she should.

Roger Gordon: I think she is very knowledgeable and I think she passes those calls on to the different departments and if we don't know, that is the number we give people without giving them suggestion as far as the departments. We have a department that we know can handle the call. We give them the 289-0000 and they ask direction of the department so she doesn't have to redirect it. But she does a nice job.

Mayor Stewart: When you look at the city of Ashland, the list is really long. It is rather non descript for the person that calls a city once or twice a year and I have been wrestling with that. I don't like what we have. I don't have the solution, either monetarily or something that fits into the monetary funds available today. A single number, to me, is a great way to go. And then you train one person instead of the public and those who call twice a week will know where to call, but those who call once or twice a year, they could get the same level of service.

Ruth Detrow: Anything else, comments or questions? None

Mayor Stewart: I think these committees were formed last year, is that correct Ruth?

Ruth Detrow: Yes.

Mayor Stewart: I want to thank those who has served on these committees and some of you that are going to continue, as President of last year's Council, I felt somewhat responsible in recruiting Ruth to take this on and I feel I owe all of you a thank you for what you have done. There has been a lot of effort, a lot of time expended and I really believe we are making some progress. It is not coming at us like a freight train, but it is moving. Thank you.

Motion to Adjourn Work Session by Paul Wertz, Moved by Robert L. Valentine W1, seconded by Robert M. Valentine W2.

Ayes: Robert L. Valentine W1, Robert M. Valentine W2, Ruth Detrow, Paul Wertz

[Meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m.](#)

Submitted by
Valarie Bishoff
Clerk of Council