

HOUSING, NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES & REDEVELOPMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

July 7, 2022

Members Present: *Council Member, Chair Crystal Murillo*
Council Member, Vice-Chair Ruben Medina
Council Member, Juan Marcano

Others Present: Mattye Sisk, Adrian Botham, Jessica Prosser, Alicia Montoya, Andrea Amonick, Angela Garcia, Brandt Van Sickle, Brooke Bell, Daniel Krzyzanowski, Jackie Ehmann, Jacquelyn Bayard, Jeff Hancock, Jennifer Orozco, John Wesolowski, Karen Hancock, Mindy Parnes, Richard Goggins, Roberto Venegas, Sharon Duwaik, Courtney Tassin, Scott Campbell

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Council Member Murillo welcomed everyone to the meeting.

MINUTES

June 2, 2022 minutes were approved.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

No announcements were made.

NEW ITEMS

Community Development Investment and 2022 Private Activity Bond Assignment

Summary of Issue and Discussion

Alicia Montoya, the Manager of Community Development, presented this item. There is a certain amount of Private Activity Bonds (PAB) assigned to Aurora which is then allocated to different investment types including affordable housing. PABs in Aurora are utilized for new construction, acquisition, and rehabilitation of affordable housing for low and moderate-income individuals or families. For PABs, interest paid to bondholders is exempt from federal income tax which makes projects cheaper. The first round of Community Development Investment (CDI) was done earlier this year and assigned \$21 million towards three different projects that were approved at the May 9 City Council Meeting. \$11 million was given to Fitzsimons Gateway Apartments, \$5 million to Aurora Metro Center Station Senior Housing, and \$5 million to Weatherstone Apartments. The full \$21,387,505.00 assignment of the allocation of PAB is recommended to go to the Aurora Housing Authority which will then distribute the funding to the three different projects.

The Summer 2022 round of CID is live with \$300,000 of CBDG funds, \$1 million of HOME funds, and \$2 million of ARPA funds to be assigned. The application deadline is July 8, 2022. This was advertised through a press release, the newspaper, and the city website.

Questions/Comments

Alicia mentioned that they have received questions from applicants. CM Murillo asked what themes or trends have emerged and what questions people have asked about the application. Alicia mentioned there are projects that reached out to ask for additional funding. She mentioned that the

application through Neighborly Software has been streamlined before they posted the second round of CDI. CM Murillo stated that people can apply for future funding if they were already awarded. She mentioned that the city should balance priorities in terms of housing strategy and try to support multiple organizations that would benefit from city support. She added that they should also evaluate the benefit of prior funding organizations have received and their ability to follow through on their commitments. Alicia encouraged organizations to apply even if they have received previous funding. She mentioned that the current priority is the housing strategy and that decisions of the review committee will support the housing strategy of the city.

Outcome – The Committee unanimously supported the assignment of the city’s PAB allocation for the year 2022 to the Aurora Housing Authority.

City Greenhouse Overview

Summary of Issue and Discussion

Brooke Bell, the Director of Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS), and John Wesolowski, the Manager of Parks and Forestry, presented this item. Currently, the city has three greenhouses between 2nd Avenue and the Highline Canal. Two are between 3,000 and 4,000 square feet while the other is less than 400 square feet. The greenhouses were built in the mid-1970’s and were previously used to grow annual plants. However, the primarily use is for storage. Up until six months ago, two individuals from Parks Operations and Maintenance used the greenhouses to grow plant material flowers to be put at the AMC and around parks as their passion project. They also experimented with seed germination. However, one of these individuals has retired and one has left the city. With the poor condition of the greenhouses, irrigation and essential mechanical systems have been removed and the cover or “skin” must be replaced.

A complete evaluation of the condition of the greenhouse is recommended. This would indicate the scope and cost of making them operational. In addition to this, plans to add other amenities, such as green and sustainable amenities or water recycling amenities should be determined. Partnerships and staffing must also be investigated. Currently, PROS is down 30% on staff but is hopeful that will overcome the staffing shortage in the following years. There would then be a possibility to hire a farm supervisor, greenhouse horticultural supervisor, and several staff. Further consideration would be evaluating the interest of the greenhouse and the partnerships for the greenhouse through the PROS master plan effort. Staff plans to do a comprehensive public engagement with community partners including Denver Urban Gardens, Project Worthmore, and other communities with residents that immigrated to Aurora. The master plan process is expected to be completed in a year. Following this will be the development of the strategic plan.

In 2018, the Denver Urban Gardens representatives including the CEO met with staff to discuss the potential of renovating one of the greenhouses and creating an opportunity for the immigrant community that comes from agricultural countries. They discussed establishing private-public partnerships to create small business opportunities or food sources. This would also help with transitional employment in the city. However, Denver Urban Gardens had financial difficulties and a change in leadership, so the plans were not pursued.

Questions/Comments

CM Murillo mentioned that after her re-election, she was able to tour different facilities as a reintroduction to the city. She toured the greenhouses and asked questions about the possibilities for the properties as she works with organizations that deal with food access. She added that she found

proposals from Denver Urban Gardens and Project Worthmore to program the space which would be a great community benefit. This would support the community by providing culturally relevant food and job opportunities. Since then, she has been approached by two other organizations with the same interests. She mentioned that there are projects in Northwest Aurora around mapping food sources from a community health perspective. CM Murillo said she hoped the presentation would be more centered around specific costs. She added that there is logic in adding it to the master plan, however, she thinks there should be room to be nimble and meet the current interest and need. She added that waiting a year to have it incorporated would not be the best plan given that they already know what needs to get done. She gave direction on exploring that option and seeing the cost. She asked if Brooke had any insight on what the study would look like to evaluate the building.

Brooke stated that she will see what they can do to get the condition assessment done and find the budget for the development faster. She will talk with Laura Perry regarding this. She added that they will find a company to do the assessment and she estimates the process will be a four to six-month effort. This will be done by the end of December 2022 or January 2023. During this time, they can reach out to different organizations regarding their interest. She added that they can still incorporate it into the PROS master plan while not waiting for the completion of the master plan. CM Murillo said that she is amenable to the presented plan.

CM Marcano said he also wanted to inquire about the ability to repurpose the greenhouses for suburban food production to show people how to be self-sufficient in a community asset or in their own gardens. He expressed excitement about the direction. CM Medina said CM Murillo is right to move the plan as quickly as possible. He mentioned that there are groups in North Aurora which have been doing work around food scarcity. He mentioned that they have been working with local farms and with getting agriculture jobs for immigrant refugees. He added that there are a lot of connections and resources to tap which could potentially provide funds as well. CM Medina said that Tri-County Health also put money into these opportunities.

CM Murillo said there are grants that map out different food assets in Northwest Aurora with a larger purpose of working with Tri-County Health and funding associated with building a strategic plan. She said they need to find out the cost for one-time funds and operational costs and whether they can be completely sourced out or if it would be a city commitment. She mentioned that they have a budget workshop coming up and she hopes to get an update on the costs.

Brooke mentioned the City of Westminster created a video on how they renovated their greenhouse called the Briggs Greenhouse Garden Center which is 14,000 square feet. They put meeting spaces and programs for teenagers heading to college to get into horticulture and agriculture. She added that they have done different environmentally green and sustainable efforts with their greenhouse and their ideas could also be incorporated into Aurora's greenhouse renovation. She will get more information on the cost and condition of the current greenhouses.

Outcome – The Committee directed staff to expedite the process of the greenhouse renovation and get more information on the cost.

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

Updates from Community Members

CM Murillo asked if there are comments on the YouTube Livestream. CM Marcano mentioned that the chat is still currently disabled.

Next meeting: Thursday, August 4, 2022, at 10 a.m.

Meeting Adjourned: 10:36 a.m.

APPROVED: *Crystal Murillo* Aug 8, 2022
Crystal Murillo (Aug 8, 2022 22:54 MDT)
Committee Chair, Crystal Murillo