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**City of La Marque  
Workshop Minutes  
March 23, 2015**

**Minutes of the Workshop Meeting of the City Council of the City of La Marque, Texas that was conducted on Monday, March 23, 2015 at 3:30 p.m. at 1109-B Bayou Road for purpose of considering the following agenda:**

**(1) Mayor Hocking called the meeting to order at 3:33 pm.**

**(2) ROLL CALL**

Mayor Hocking  
Mayor Pro-Tem Bell  
Councilmember Lane  
Councilmember Brown  
Councilmember Trube

City Manager Buttler  
City Attorney Ortego  
City Clerk Eldridge

**(3) INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** – to be addressed in the Regular City Council meeting.

Mayor Hocking deviated from the Regular Agenda, and reported that Police Chief Vikki King has given her resignation as Police Chief. "I am literally disappointed that someone would come to our city and take a couple of paychecks from our small city, while continuing to search for other employment. Although City Council is not involved in Personnel, Assistant Police Chief Kirk Jackson will be appointed as Police Chief. He has been with the City for over twenty years and is highly capable."

**(4) NEW BUSINESS**

a. Discussion/receive update on the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (Blight Reduction) and provide further direction to City Manager.

City Manager Carol Buttler began, "This workshop is to give you an idea of where staff is at the moment, more of a snapshot. We still feel like we need further direction, but we took what was discussed a few months ago, and did research on the Neighborhood Revitalization Program that had begun before Hurricane IKE. I have provided you all with information that you have seen before, the Revitalization Program itself that was worked on by several members of the community. I also printed off of the New Orleans website, about how they are doing their website, which is what we intend to do, once we launch our new website, hopefully within the next thirty days. The Good Neighbor Program has been in place in several neighborhoods but we have not formalized it here in La Marque. We practice, it like we practice demolition and we



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practice high weeds and grass. What I am asking first, I want to be sure we are going in the right direction, with what you as a Council have in mind. We know that it will take funding, we know that it will take community as well as the support of City Council. We have made some progress on some of the 'urgent' items which is within thirty days, and are in the process of making further progress on some of the immediate items, which are within three to six months, the six months or longer items, will be more complex, but I think it is a good beginning if we are on the right tracks."

Discussion continued identifying a "junked vehicle", and it was mentioned that the ordinance will need to be amended to reflect State laws. A report of structures identified as part of the "blight" was received.

Public Works Director Les Rumburg showed three (3) maps, one showing demolition projects that have been completed within the twelve months, broken down into districts.

Councilmember Bell asked for a ratio between the amounts of structures within the districts (total of 145 structures) "A" (39%); "B" (8%); "D" 28% and "C" 28%. It was reminded to all that most of these are complaint driven.

Mr. Rumburg continued presenting the report by showing a second map with "work in the process", those locations being reviewed by the Building Standards Commission, or that are pending with Code Enforcement.

The third map showing the concentrated areas of the highest number of calls for high weeds and other types of complaints (illegal dumping). It was mentioned to post these locations to the website or YouTube in an effort to detour the illegal dumping.

City Manager continued, "After the City Attorney reviewed the Revitalization Plan, he recommended the Neighborhood Empowerment Plan, may be the way to go, since according to the Local Government Corporation, it must be created and, essentially, the Economic Development Corporation Board could probably fill that same role. New Orleans had success because they had five (5) "blight" days and six (6) more Volunteer for Life days. We have one Clean-up Day in the spring, and then possibly another one in the fall, and then we have the Shred Day, but we don't have a full blown program established. Mr. Rumburg is working with the drainage district to try to figure out the best way to do the ditch cleaning portion. Some of the key things, I noticed was lack of circulation, and two just "clean up" and three to improve La Marque's image in general to the outside world. I know that there were five lots that were being targeted, and of what my understanding was, that they needed more like ten lots to make it worthwhile for a builder to come in and actually revitalize a neighborhood. Do you like the Revitalization Plan, still as it was lined out? Mr. Crowder can probably give us some insight."

Ron Crowder, Chairman of the Economic Development Corporation spoke on his experiences, and reaffirmed that the City owned five or six lots along 1765 and Lake Road and originally it was studied to find out its commercial value. "In the actual reports, the consultants basically derived a number of things, that 1765 and Lake Road do have commercial value, but the internal



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neighborhood leaves a serious consideration. The majority of homes in the Lake Road area are not home owners, they are rental property and most of the owners lived out of state. The other thing the study proved was that there is no flow of traffic in the Lake Road area, and has several dead end streets. It would be beneficial if those streets could be horseshoed together with an end street. The Council appointed an Ad Hoc Committee that met and were asked for their input. The community was not in favor of having any more east/west traffic or north south traffic. They liked their internal neighborhood. They spoke about closing in some of the ditches. Lake Road itself has right-of-way issues. This committee thought that one of the directions they should be taking was to look at structures on the tax rolls that were delinquent to see if those could be acquired, and also within the neighborhood, some of the structures that were inhabitable and that could be taken down. At some point, it was encouraged to work with local developers. Bankers were hesitant to lend within that area. It was discussed to place money in a Development Fund. Build one or two new residences in that neighborhood, when those properties sold, money would come back into the fund to build more houses and with the idea that we would be able to help or assist the builders with their financing. It is a real easy problem to solve as long as you have a pocketful of money. If we could get some seed money, I think we could see some real accomplishments in that area." Said that he is pleased to see that this Council is revisiting this issue.

Councilmember Bell asked "What sort of financial revenue streams could you anticipate that would be available for us to go after?"

Mr. Crowder answered, "The Committee recommended \$100,000 for five years and have a five year program. That was directed towards redevelopment of homes, acquiring the tax delinquent properties, demolishing some of the inhabitable homes, and rebuilding new properties. If we are looking at the road construction, we would need to do more research and cost quite a bit more. There were a few big home developers showing interest, but they needed a number of lots, they cannot operate a few lots, they were speaking of a complete subdivision."

Further discussion included the possibility of money being available through grants or small programs.

Councilmember Bell asked, "What if the City were to begin the process of acquiring properties that are tax delinquent, would this be a start? Where would we be able to find the funding for this type of operation?"

Mr. Crowder answered, "We would need to create a Revitalization Fund, to initiate some of the resources towards that particular fund. Council could set up this type of fund; a consultant would know how to go about this. Once the fund is established, build the fund with unencumbered sales tax revenue, as things do develop, with the new sales tax revenue, that the city hasn't budgeted yet or designated for anything. The ideal situation would be so that the fund could rebuild itself. La Marque Economic Development Corporation has some background in acquiring properties with delinquent taxes. The EDC has some limitations, it is not eligible for residential development."



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Councilmember Trube asked for clarification to a portion of the backup, relating to “zones.”

City Manager replied that these individual zones were options for the funding, with a similar concept being the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone.

Mayor spoke of the City being a member of the Southeast Texas Housing (SETH). Said there are mechanisms to help individual families receive financial aid to afford to buy homes. “Revitalization has so many moving parts; acquiring the property, demolishing, cleaning up the lot then rebuilding and getting it back as a paying entity, paying property.” Then spoke of Lake Road, and that the County is in the process of improving this area by extending sidewalks along some of this area to approve the aesthetics and travel within the city.

Mr. Crowder further clarified the “zones” that Councilmember Trube had mentioned earlier.

Councilmember Bell said, “Some of us may not in support or in favor but we need to be careful we have vacant lots that the City is not receiving any tax monies from.... and if we can acquire those properties and in turn build and then receive taxes on. The City could be more financially prosperous, so that the City could do those things such as streets, drainage, police, and fire. All of us would benefit from this type of a program.”

Alex Getty, Executive Director of the LMEDC reported that he has been successful in sheriff sales in the past. He looks at the County’s website to find these properties locations. “If you go to sale, and there are no bidders, it is struck off to the County, then at some point, representatives from each taxing entity would be able to bid on these properties in an effort to get them back on the tax rolls.”

City Manager reported that the City will continue abating the nuisances, demolishing with the help of the Building Standards Commission and also continue having the contractor secure the structures in the vacant lots. More monies had been added to further the demolition of these properties. “We would like to hear from City Council as what you would like for us to do.”

Councilmember Trube referred to exhibit A versus exhibit B. “I really have a problem with exhibit “B”. It gets into, starting this Board or Corporation that would be over this and it goes into programs, job training, early childhood development, scholarship fund, which I am not against scholarships, by any means. You can add the fact that this is what New Orleans is doing, and I understand New Orleans is very much larger than we are. I regularly watch a TV show that is filmed in New Orleans, and by watching it, it shows what has NOT been done in New Orleans and that there is a lot to be desired to finish up, if they have this program going.”

City Manager said “I wasn’t excited about this either. It is a statute that is available to cities for blighted areas. This is just a few options that are available to cities.”

City Attorney Ellis Ortego mentioned that he included these two exhibits, they were mentioned in the newspaper in the study back in 2007. “I agree, the second one wouldn’t be appropriate for us.”



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Mayor Hocking said, "Our financial picture in La Marque, between now and budget time, is probably going to be going pretty good. Finances could be flowing at a greater rate. It can be discussed during the budget process, this \$100,000 a year set aside for revitalization, this gives us time to further study and have more meetings to fine tune a plan to reach more cohesiveness in what we are talking about."

Councilmember Trube stated, "Since I am an infrastructure person, before, I would agree to this, I would need to know exactly where we stand on our infrastructure in District "A", and the condition of our fire hydrants. I don't want to see all of those new home go up and we have a poor water and sewer supply and fire hydrants that don't work."

Several areas were discussed including to continue the clean-up and demolition of the dilapidated homes and to begin working with EDC to formulate a plan and discuss during the budget process. Acquire a program to allow ten lots to begin with, and to move forward, to see if there are programs outside of the city who have funds available. Working with local developers. To place more teeth into the Code Enforcement process. Empire our citizens to be their own code enforcement officers and to streamline the complaint process on-line.

Mayor refers to the plan and encourages all to look at the objections and strategies to continue moving forward. The new website will help citizens to become part of the solution.

It was encouraged to have the departments (Police, Fire and Code Enforcement) be aware of where the junked vehicles are, when they should be towed, and follow through with the process. Also encouraged was to go out to your districts, pick street and begin the cleaning.

Councilmember Bell said, "Before we can get our City to buy in, we, as a City, have to lead by example, and we need to go into those problem areas, and do what we can..... once this is established...we started this, now all you all need to do is follow behind and finish this."

Mayor Hocking said that the Garage Sale ordinance is falling behind in this enforcement, encouraged the police department to enforce the ordinance more stringently, and continued, "I think we have come all long way today, in being on one cord on what we all want to see happen."

Councilmember Lane asked, "What will be the means of getting the word out to the citizens of the "Good Neighbor Program"?"

City Manager reported that the Code Enforcer Darrell Singleton spoke at a recent civic groups. "I would like to have him work with us on something that we can get out to the citizens, explain what the City does and what the citizens responsibility is. In another City, the City purchased addresses, and gave them to citizens free of charge."



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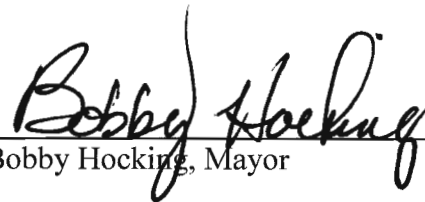
Further discussion touched on the idea of a member of staff from the Police and Fire Departments helping from a Code Enforcement standpoint. Communicating with the public, paying on-line, the new website.

Councilmember Brown spoke about the lack of street signs, the pumps working after all the rain recently

**(5) ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\*** Councilmember Trube made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:57 p.m. Councilmember Lane seconded. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

  
Robin Eldridge, TRMC  
City Clerk

  
Bobby Hocking, Mayor