

Group 1 - Council

Thanks everybody for coming out today. I'm sure as you are all well aware as you came to this meeting, the GAI team was selected to update the West Side Renewal Plan and the intent of the stakeholder meetings today and this first one which is designate for council, is really listening as much as anything. So, David is going to give a little introduction, kind of where we stand at this point and then from that point our goal is to really get your input on what we can do to make the West Side a better place.

Dave: Well, and maybe before we do that, I think we probably know most, each and every one of us, but let's maybe just quickly go around the room. Again. I'm Dave Gilmore and *I'm the director of Planning and Landscape Architecture at GAI.

I'm Jeanine _____ and I sit on City Council representing _____

I'm Pat Jones, Council Person with _____.

Dave _____, Charleston Planning.

Andy Richardson, City Council at large.

Mary Jean Davis, Council at Large.

Tom Lane, Council at Large.

Ed Talkington, _____ Ward, West Side.

Ron _____ with CURA.

Adam _____, Z&M Architects and Engineers.

_____, Charleston Branch, NAACP.

Dave G: And we've got somebody in the back here.

Marilyn _____ and I'm actually just sitting in as many meetings as I can and I'm going to be participating _____.

Carol _____.

Well and before I kind of go over today what we're wanting to do, I thought, it occurred to us that maybe a lot of us don't even know why we're here or what this is all about. So, before I get into this a whole lot, because we really want to get into this, because we only have, we've got several of these planned but we're going to try to keep this to an hour / hour-and-a-half per meeting but maybe Ron could give a little bit of a background about what CURA does and then also sort of the basis of what has led us here today.

I think everybody here is fairly familiar so I'll make it really quick, but CURA, was basically established un a state ordinance, so we primarily work with and report to the City. We're not a direct agency of the City but we're very, very close, kissing cousins, let's put it that way. But basically, we have a plan that we designed, it was designed in 2008, the green shaded area here and then the red area was just done I think in 2016 which was a combination of multiple plans that we're dealing with downtown. So we currently have 3 plans basically which is the East End, the Central Business District and the far West Side. Our mission, is a little confusing, but primarily it's the elimination of _____ and if you look on our mission statement we want to be a catalyst that stimulates an environment where private investment can flourish. So, we don't consider ourselves the end all answer, we want to be that little blue nudge that gets everything going in the right direction and allows for private investment to take over. We're also unique to this area. One of the few _____ in the country that are not funded by taxes. Most _____ get an incremental property tax, we don't. We get rent from properties that we own, our key

asset is the way it underleads the Town Center Mall, the Marriott and the Parking Garages which you all know right now is in a bit of a transition phase, but we're cautiously optimistic there's a window of time which it will come back and do well, we'll just have to see. But other than that, I can answer questions, but primarily we're looking at a plan that is 10 years old, plans generally even though they have a 20-year life, they don't generally stay, it's hard to keep them relevant for 20 years, it's hard to be that smart upfront. So, we got to take a re-look at it, it's an opportunity to amend it and see if there's a road map that could kind of help the West Side to continue to expand and grow and improve.

Okay, well I think that.

Excuse me, the green area is the West Side area.

Yeah this is actually named the West Side Community Renewal Plan.

And just a little bit more on that, that was done I think in 2008. There's also a community renewal plan for the East End as well, that's probably just as old or maybe even a little older and then the one in the red as I said was updated in 2016, those were very similar in nature but what those were combined because they dealt primarily with the commercial zones in town. So, the one in the green and then the one equally in the Community Renewal Plan on the East End, deals primarily with residential and make no bones about it, that's what this effort is about, so we're going to be concentrating on not only just looking at the boundary but a complete renew and update of that plan that deals with the West Side. The East End hasn't been updated yet, but at some point, that will probably need to be done. As Ron said, those start to get old after about 10 years and even the best plan should be dusted off and kind of updated. So, it's definitely a good time to be doing this.

And David, we don't want to get into details, I think

Right

Of the existing plan. But there was one statement in here that kind of guided their efforts that I think is good to view.

Right, right.

The expanded area is in need of redevelopment plan to stop the continued deterioration of housing and improvements in infrastructure, safety, housing, open space, and business opportunities. So, you can see that it is a multi-faceted plan to address a variety of things that would improve the West Side and I think that is something that we need to address as we move forward. It's not a singular focus, it's a focus on the whole neighborhood.

Yeah, and the strategic plan is just that, it's wide ranging recommendations on how you can improve that area under study, so we'll kind of dive into that. So, what we, and this is just the beginning of this study. It's kind of a three-phase approach. The first phase is just listening. It's a fact-finding approach and it's interviewing specific focus groups, but there's also a series, I think we have 3 public meetings scheduled. The first one, and we'll start to get some information out on that, but it's probably as early as tomorrow or the weekend but I think, just so you all know the first one was scheduled.

We are aiming for September 11 at 6PM, that is a Tuesday.

Isn't there a meeting today at 3PM.

There's a series of stakeholder meetings today that are council is at nine or eight, at 10 o'clock its main streets and businesses, 1 o'clock is, I don't have the full list in front of me. But 3 o'clock is non-profits and service providers, tomorrow it's educators, so these first 2 days are a series of focus groups.

Because the reason I asked, is Paula Flaherty told me about the 3 o'clock one and I reached out to the Smokehouse and the Grille, but I don't think the Grille is in the West Side CURA plan area. Also, she

asked that I reach out to my friends at Mountain State Justice and they're supposed to have a representative at 3PM here and Newland, I've got it in my office, but. (08:20.23).

We've also got Goodwill coming at 3, Girl Scouts.

Oh year Girl Scouts, we reached out to them as well.

Yeah, so we've got a good group of non-profits and service providers coming in at 3.

And then there's the Fraternal Orders of Equals are going to have a representative as well.

That's fantastic, thank you.

Perfect. That's what these are about, they're move, they're just focused but sort of like a group of like-minded people that we're wanting to get as much information from and they'll be interviews, of course, over the next couple of days and then we'll have the first of 3 public meetings in about 2-2.5 weeks.

And we're hoping the location is going to be, assuming these where we have to buy buildings meeting, I left them a message yesterday trying to confirm that they're available, so hopefully we can get that confirmed today.

So are there any questions before we kind of dive into this, as far as, or comments just in general.

What's your timeline, can we start with that.

Well this will cause the approach, I think we would like to try to get this done towards the end of the year if possible.

Politically your change over with the new administration, I just wonder how that will jive.

Yeah, I think that certainly comes into play, although I don't know if they would have, whether new, because we also hope to involve, you know, the candidates coming in and that certainly is a goal, but just sort of fell in with the adoption process the way we had to take this to council and when we had to take it to council it just also worked out that it was going to be around mid-December, I think, was when.

Yeah and we have a schedule mapped out that shows this in mid-December.

January, I think it is January.

Yeah, so you would have it before this council for about.

Yeah, I think this last meeting was sometime in, to take it to, absolutely take it to council to adoption was sometime in, we have it all scheduled out, I think it was in December. But then if we started to back-up, we needed to get this in front of the planning commission and there are some steps before we even get it to council, so that's why it just sort of felt that we could try to get it done in December, would be best.

As a representative of the _____Mormon Group of Charleston Branch of the NAACP, we fell like this meeting and the ideas to update the 2008 plan has been precipitated by our participation with Charleston Urban Renewal Authority and request that we have made for public hearings and for requesting, trying to figure out what was going to happen going forward. This has been a 10-year process for some of us, maybe even longer. I started working on the West Side in 1992, so I'm kind of at the end of the road and we came across a model that says that if you want to not get something done, you keep starting over and this seems to me like a starting over type process. But where we are and be more particular than maybe the rest of the group, is where are we going to go from here. It took us 10 years to get CURA to decide to spend \$500,000 to start removing the slum _____. They did it in one meeting and in two weeks houses were coming down. Two weeks ago, CURA committed, sort of

committed some funding to the residence for purchase and rehab and we haven't heard back from CURA about where that's going or how much money is going to be allocated and the community is sitting on edge waiting for an answer to those questions and as we begin this process, it would be advantageous for the community to understand about the situation that happened two weeks ago and maybe this is not the place for it but sometimes in the near future, we really need to know the amount of money and what the guidelines are going to be so we can start to move forward with the planning that we need to do to update the residence and give people who live in the area involved in this process, because I mean 10 years is a long time to wait on anything and I know that some of you may not been around 10 years ago when this thing came up, but I've been through this once and you know to throw out the old plan, I don't think that's the greatest idea in the world because there was some good stuff in there. We need to be, in my opinion, we need to be starting to move forward so that the community can see some real actions take place as far as the Charleston Urban Renewal, the Charleston City Council, is concerned in rebuilding the West Side Community and as a footnote, in the West Side Renewal Plan of 2008, our area was designated as a home ownership zone and we went back to 10 years and tried to figure out what had happened in this home ownership zone over the last 10 years, you would find very little progress has been made and the commitment from the meeting two weeks ago kind of centered on that home ownership zone. So, if we can, you know, figure out how to throw some of that stuff in these meetings over the next two days, it would be very helpful to choose the _____ group of the Charleston Branch NAACP, two organizations that I am on, and for the general community, especially as it relates to the home ownership zone.

Bob, just to address a couple of your concerns, first of all this is an update to the Community Renewal Plan, so this isn't getting thrown out, we're just going to update it, you know, based on what has occurred and what needs to occur going forward for the next 10 years and although your concerns are rightfully addressed about maybe some other issues, we need to focus in these meetings on what we want this neighborhood to look like in 10 years and what's it going to take to get there. So, we do want to keep it focused and there will be opportunities for action and just to be clear when we have these stakeholder groups, I met with the Tuesday morning group the other day and they identified the one stakeholder group that we didn't identify was just residential. So, we are going to, and we have intended to handle that through a series of public meetings but based on that concern we are going to place some additional focus on that. So, obviously that's a large part of this effort.

We're actually going to add a focus group specifically for that.

I'll be at every meeting, if at all possible.

Well we would like to have you there so.

I read the plan and I've gone over the plan and I know the plan was amended two years ago and I have a lot of questions. I was born and raised on the West Side. Apparently, this plan here starts at Hunt Avenue, correct me if I'm wrong, starts at Hunt Avenue and goes straight down to let's say Little Page and then crosses down and goes to 7th Avenue way. Does it go across the bridge to Orchard Manor?

It is everything identified in.

Yeah, in the, and just one other quick interjection, the update was in the red, we're updating the community plan.

This has not been updated, yeah right.

But this I will also say, I can say relatively sure that this boundary, that is one of the things we'll want to talk about is going to, that's one of the underlying things, the point of updating this plan is to adjust this boundary, so we'll talk about that.

The boundary should be adjusted.

I'm on the West Side constantly and I know Mr. _____, Mr. Jones, and several of us are. I have a concern about the slum lords and the fact that they receive federal monies from HUD for their tenants and that's a big concern for me because.

It's huge, yeah.

I don't think CURA ought to come in and do what they should be doing and I really want to be involved. I love the community, I want the whole area to be treated fairly, but I do think that we do need to address the fact that the slum lords are getting federal funding for, to have tenants put in there, that don't have, that are low income and yet they don't even cut the grass.

Right.

One of the strategies put in the plan is certain ordinances perhaps that put pressure on the bylaws. I agree with you, I think our penalty fee structure is way too low.

Absolutely.

Yeah, and getting around the federal government that are issuing these grants or loans or whatever you want to call it, that's not happening so I think that as Ron aid, we'll want to incorporate some strategies as far as how the city has a little bit more teeth.

And I do know that since I've been on City Council, it's a lot easier to say let's do it, I want to do it, how can I help, than it is to actually do those things. But I think this is great and I do want to be involved.

Okay, I think that is really an important issue.

It is.

I hear that a lot.

And as we said, this particular update is focusing on residential, that's what it is about and that's going to come up over and over and over again.

I want to be very careful, it does have a residential focus, we might hear from groups that there's another thing that they want.

Sure.

Besides we keep it on.

Sure.

Dave let me ask a question, Jeanine has hit on something that it probably a core issue that comes up any time we have a meeting on the West Side like this. For this morning's purposes, what do you want to accomplish in the hour that we have.

Well our goal is, you know, you all have a unique, as all the focus groups do, will have a unique viewpoint and really I think this particular group just because of your positions have a really good pulse on the community, just because just running for council and so you're talking to a lot of the residents so, we want to keep these discussions fairly informal but we want to just give you all the opportunity to share with us, because this is about listening.

That's great, that's what we need to hear.

We're here to listen, because the first part of this plan is we're listening, we'll talk later in months to come as we start to present the draft, but we're trying to get, we're pulling out as much information

from the public and these focus groups as we can, so anything like you want to share, Mary Jean, we're here to listen and then that all gets taken into account.

Let me ask you this, when you're having a meeting of stakeholders, are you having a meeting with landlords that have properties on the West Side.

Yes, yeah.

Yeah.

You do have it.

Yeah, I'm not sure, I don't have the list.

I think that as far as some of the residents on the West Side that I see with Jeanine and with Chuck and Pat is that they live next door to properties that are owned by landlords who don't maintain the property and it's not fair. I don't care if your house is only worth a thousand dollars, if you have a slum landlord beside you, it's not fair.

And by law, they don't even live in town and that's, you know, that's another.

We could spend all morning talking about this issue, but I bet if you go around to this group, I bet you every single person here is going to say that issue.

Not everyone, I'm a landlord. I have homes on the West Side and I rent some property through the HUD process which is very stringent and the government is not giving landlords free money. Their units are inspected annually and whatever defects are found, have to be corrected or their rent subsidies will be eliminated and the resident has to find other places to live. So, the problem with what you may call slum lords and I don't know whether you're a landlord or not, but when you try to deal with _____ people, it is probably one of the most difficult group of people that you could possibly have to work with. Because an old slogan says poor people have poor ways and that's because of the fact that they just don't have the income to do the things that they need to do and some landlords whose rent may be \$500-\$600 a month, may be collecting \$200-\$300, not \$500 or \$600.

Bob I didn't mean to suggest that there aren't serious issues and I for one understand that HUD has requirements, some of those requirements are difficult to meet.

Well if you don't meet them, they don't pay you.

Right.

So you don't have a choice.

And I also, I think that also we probably also understand that tenants are a huge problem, and once you get one in your building, it can be very difficult to evict even a bad one. So, it's a two-way street here, but I don't think we can ignore the fact that we have landlords that aren't paying the fire service fees, have huge deficiencies, they have other taxes they are not paying and they're not cutting the grass.

Yeah, I mean there are things are just obvious and questionable. We could walk out here right now and go two blocks and start to look at all the properties that aren't being maintained. So, the property maintenance issue, regardless of whether it's HUD rentals, regular rentals, or owned homes, I mean it's an issue.

Right.

You can see it right there.

I too think that at some point we need to get a van, a bus, whatever, and I think that we have to go through this area. For example, I was coming home from a meeting the other night in North Charleston for Pat's ward and at the intersection of Washington Street and Virginia Street, I'm not sure if your familiar with Woodrow Wilson place, the apartments there. I don't know if the area that I'm talking about is to be maintained by the city or the landlord but I am anxious to find out, because the steps leading up to those apartments are covered and I was just at the light and I thought I just wonder if anyone is on those steps and mid-way up there was and he was putting Heroin with a needle in his leg and I think areas such as that, whether it's the landlords that are responsible, the city is responsible for the trees, the grass, the brush, the bushes, I think that your group, our group, however, we want to define it, we need to define those areas and get them cleaned up.

So let's talk about one thing, maybe we should talk about ownership versus rental, not who cuts the grass and who doesn't. I hear that a lot and I think there's a bias that ownership is great but in today's world, look around the country and there's a big movement towards rental, so rental's not bad per say.

Oh no, I agree.

So should our strategy be to stimulate ownership, to try to figure out how to deal with rentals, do we not care, do we not define the two, where do you draw the line. I mean I think the West Side is already 47% rental and that transition has occurred.

Bob wouldn't you think with that there's a, something that we can with any plan, are not going to be able to radically change. I mean you can encourage ownership but you're going to have rental.

Right, but if the plans says encourage ownership and it's silent on residential that will be focused. If the plan says both, then you work on both, so that's kind of my point, we sort of can nudge things, we can't change things, but we can define what we think is the primary. Sorry, Pat did you want to say something.

I just want to change places, change the subject here real quick. I got two things. Okay we started the West Side Streetscape years ago, almost 20 years ago, okay. To me it was never put in place the way it was supposed to be. There was supposed to be rules, store fronts were supposed to be remodeled, they never were, they're still the same storefronts. On the East End, when they did theirs, they came in and straightened up a lot of places. And then you have the Florida Streetscape, which I don't think it was ever done up to what it was supposed to be. It's still the same way it was. I don't understand, it seems like when the West Side has a Streetscape on West Washington Street and Florida Street, well it's just hit or miss. It's the West Side, they'll be happy with a little bit of concrete and they'll be happy that we put a couple of power lines underneath the ground, but you go to the East End when they done it, and I know why and you do too, the Clay Center, they wanted that gateway to the Clay Center, but everything was done, completely and they tried to claim that the city of there, they built the power lines underneath the road where it was supposed to be, tore down houses, but it seems like on the West Side, when we get something, it's not done, what they say they're going to do and I don't understand that. And then another thing, some people witness it, word one is where I'm at. There is property on the other side of Kanawha two mile and all the time, every meeting that I go to, it's like the city ends right here and I'm not, I guess I am crying but I'm not crying. Mary Jean was there, they didn't even have me on the map and I had one of the meetings.

I remember that.

The City of Charleston ended at Iowa Street, we were not, I guess we were Dunbar or South Charleston, I don't know and it's the same thing with this meeting, Iowa Street is you cutoff basically or Kanawha Turnpike and you know, this area we're part of the Charleston down here.

Are you suggesting that that should be included in the Upper Kanawha.

Well I mean, she went to a meeting the other night, she was there, and everyone in my ward says we're not part of Charleston, is that not what this is.

They feel that, they feel that.

We feel like at the Kanawha two-mile, that's as far as it goes and I think here is another example, if you show this CURA map to our people down there, they're going to say well we're in it again.

Well how did we originally, how was it originally determined what area would be part of the Urban Renewal Plan, because blank has crept, it was designed to address blank, blank has crept into a lot more today that it was even in 2010 and it's not all white, right, we know that. Even in the sections doesn't mean that is not all blank, but I think that's a legitimate perspective.

I think there's a history that came with it, what started this, particular area, I mean I know there was a study done, but the blank, I mean was it something CURA funding or whatever.

I mean a lot of this predates Ron, so maybe I'll try to give a little history and a lot of this pre-dates me, but in the beginning the Urban Renewal Plans were very small, they would just do a couple of blocks.

It was project specific almost.

Yeah, it was very project specific and then I mean we had two or three urban renewal districts in the downtime at the same time and then we kind of grew into corridor plans, so we did the East End, CURA did the east end, Washington Street East Corridor Plan. A couple of years later we did the Washington Street West Corridor Plan and so that basically went, you know, from the railroad tracks down to Route 21 and it just occupied the properties on either side of Washington Street. Then I think it was around 2006, we updated the East End Community Plan and it was thought at that time that the neighborhood was needing some attention and so that's when the East End ____ Plan was expanded up to the Interstate. That plan was approved, a couple of years later we tried to do the same thing on Washington Street and at the time, the far West Side flats was the area that was in greatest need and so it was a balancing act that we make the entire West Side an Urban Renewal Plan and the bigger the district gets, the more you're deluding your dollars and so at the time it was thought that the far West Side, around ____ and all that, that was going to get the most bang for the buck. So that's kind of how we were at.

And I think I heard that the Park didn't want to be included, they didn't want to be called the _____, which is why we got that hole in the zoning.

That's true.

So some people like it and some people don't. There are a few advantages in the Urban Renewal District you get a few points with the state low income housing tax credit scoring process, but as David said, unfortunately since we're not funded by property taxes expanding the district really deludes the money that you have to spend.

And every time the East End Community Renewal Plan was expanded, imminent domain was a bad word back then, and there still is even today, you know, the hurt and pain that happened in trying to plan the relocation, so it was a very tough sale back then to expand the East End Community Renewal Plan. In fact, that plan made a promise that we will not take any residential owner property by imminent domain, so that really relieved a lot of the community fears and we did the same thing when we expanded the West Side Community Renewal Plan, but that was, those were very hard obstacles to overcome.

Dave, just to reinforce what you were saying, the first plan which was adopted in 1992, was the Washington Street West Urban Renewal Plan, it was only 26 acres. The current plan is 228 acres, so they expanded it almost 10-fold when they did this in 2008.

When the West Side Renewal Plan got put in place, there was a group that was trying to update the Tiskawha Center, the school had moved out and had been given to the community and the members of the Tiskaawah Board were trying to figure out how to raise money to upgrade that building. Pat Brown, who was the director of CURA at that time, was called in and he explained to the group what the Urban

Renewal process was and what had to take place before their area could be upgraded and from that it was turned over to the West Side Neighborhood Association to begin to work with CURA to see what could be done as far as upgrading the small CURA zone that they had an increase in. They had a meeting such as this with stakeholders and everybody got to say what they thought should happen and you know it happened, so. I mean, you know, and CURA, the Charleston Urban Renewal Authority, in the City of Charleston, especially in the areas you're talking about is an organization that had developed great distrust of the residents in those areas because of the way it happened in the Triangle District. And people have long memories because when you destroy a whole area and move a whole group of people, as time goes on people don't forget that. So, what we had to do and with the 2008 plan was to try to convince the residents that this was a good thing and that CURA had great intentions and they made a lot of commitments to the people at that time and as we sit here today, most of those commitments have gone unfilled and if things would have happened in the CURA zone that we have now, the way they were supposed to, then it would have been very easy to see things expand beyond Kanawha two-mile into North Charleston or beyond Hunt Avenue, moving east of _____. But since nothing happened in the CURA zone they designated, so what's the use. I mean the distrust comes back, the inconsistency, the way the agency's business is running, the attitude of the organizations toward the people who live there. I mean what would you really expect. I mean the people respectively kept quiet over years before things started to be seen and I think the thing that kicked off what the _____ movement Charleston Branch of the NAACP was trying to do, happened in a _____ meeting where one CURA counselor, nobody has come to us and ask us for anything and when we did, all we got was turned down.

_____ real quick, so you guys are going to address those issues in a different meeting.

Yes, yes.

But those residents are, did you hear him say that 47% of the area are rentals.

According to the 2000 census it was 46, so I imagine it's much higher than that now.

But primarily it's actually the landlords because the tenants really, they don't take care of the properties like they should but it's the residents are tenants, it's the property owners that want assistance with the lights and everything.

I don't understand the question.

I'm just a bit confused, you say that 46-47% of the area are rentals, so those properties are rentals. So, the residents are really tenants.

I'm not exactly who all we're hearing from to be candid. Part of the public meetings, you know, I kind of ask people to raise their hands if you are renting, but I think I'm hearing more from owners who live next door to them.

And what she's saying, if the people that own the property aren't the stakeholders, aren't coming, the renters can't do anything about it.

Yeah, but what we need to do is put a framework in this plan that addresses how we deal with those issues whether they participate or not.

We can do a lot.

Exactly but we jumped around a little bit on a few things there. One, the challenge of the streetscapes is you can improve the public space, but it's still up to the property owners to improve their buildings and CURA has worked with that facade grant program which has made some improvements on this end of Washington, it just hasn't happened on the other end yet. And I know that's a.

But in the beginning, they were going to be forced to fix the front porch.

You can't force the property owner.

Well it was in there, if somebody goes back and checks, Powell Hardware, he was one of the ones, Smokehouse was one of the ones, that went with the rules, nobody else did, oh, Charleston Department Store.

Let me ask how that functions though.

If you don't have any rules.

Pat I think the way it's functioned, at least in the downtown area on the West Side and that is, if you're going to do something to your building, then the regulations kick in and you have to, but if you have a vacant building and you don't apply for a building permit and you're not doing anything to the building, then the requirements just lay there until something, and conversely you cannot affirmatively take a property owner that's got one of those boarded up building and say invest money into a new facade.

But these aren't boarded up, I'm talking about Charleston Department Store, come right up the street, Powell Hardware went with the rules. Cristin Powell can tell you because we stood and argued this. Then you go up Young's Department Store, his windows are broken, he didn't have to do anything, all he did was shut his front entrance and go in the back, go in Horns Alley and go in. Okay you go up Smokehouse, they renovated, the Housing Authority, they went with the rules, Emmanuel Baptist went with the rules, Cunningham Parker went with the rules, go on up to the furniture store.

____, what do you want to happen, I mean do you want to ____?

No, I want everybody to play by the same rules. Why should my Smokehouse have to redo the front of his building but we don't have the power.

I understand where you're coming from, but I do think they are all playing by the same rules, Dan is that not correct?

Yeah, ____ the rules, were on Capitol Street in conjunction with the Charleston Area Alliance back in the 80s, late 80s, early 90s?

1980s, 85-86.

And so they, there was a requirement to do facade work, but I think the Charleston Area Alliance also along with our requirement, they issued money I think to help so they kind of helped the pain, but we don't have that requirement on the West Side.

Then everything goes back to why are we pumping all of this money into a streetscape if all you're getting is nice sidewalks and light poles that aren't replaced when they're knocked down.

Pat, I think Dan may have suggested the answer and that is, somehow or another they came up with some public money to assist with the facades and affirmatively made something happen, that's what you're looking for I think and if you want to make something happen it seems to me that becomes part of the plan. It's one thing for us to sit here and say that's what you want, but the question is how do you make it happen, how is worked in the past.

I mean that's the thing, if you're not going to enforce anything, that's why we've got all these ____ properties. I don't feel like the city goes in and really goes after them. I mean.

Well, I'm not sure.

Well if you keep giving extensions after extensions after extensions to landlords, like I've got a boarded-up house that the roof is falling off of and we go down there and we send him a letter and he gets a letter, he goes to court and gets another extension, gets 3 more months, nothing ever changes

Bob. Three more months, I can show you letters that I've got from 4 years ago, 4-5 years ago, that I'm still going after Andy who owns the property and he could care less because we don't. (laughing). No, I mean, I'm just bringing attention to it, that's what I'm saying.

I have two issues here, one of the _____ program, just put it on hold, because the future of _____ and the funding but that was a great way for them to encourage property owners or business owners to kind of take the facades to the next step.

To accomplish what Pat wants to do, I mean all we can do today is come up with recommendations that these guys can draft in the plan, so to get where you want to get, it sounds to me like you need to listen what Dan is saying about what CURA could do, if there could be money for facade grants, where we work together and you try to encourage people to fix up their property and you could assist them a little bit, that, we could build that in to a plan then you get to where you want to get to.

There are two directions, one if the rules and the rules that I think I hear you saying is you're frustrated because rules are put in place and there's not an incentive to follow the rules and then the second thing is money and money is often an incentive, right. So, you can use the money either by grants and say here, we're going to help you play right or by _____ of some sort and that's probably a little harder to do under the home rule or lack of home rules you have under the state laws of WV.

Bob I'll say, and I'll just throw in, and this might be a question for Ron, but I agree this needs to be one of the primary strategies that go into this update but, you know, when we're talking about streetscape improvements, we're really talking about work within, what we call public ground, which is right-of-way to right-of-way, but then we're starting to talk about improvements to private property, we're getting into, so what is CURA's ability to sort of cross that line, I guess I'm.

Well to address Pat's concern the issues becomes and it's what we're really trying to hear from you guys, you know, what is the priority, is there a priority when the streetscape is down to somehow incentivize the private property owners to update their properties at the same time and that would be a strategy we could implement into the plan.

I'd say there should be, now how you do it is a subject for another debate probably, but if you pretty up sidewalks and lighting poles, and lighting and all that stuff, that's great. But if the folks along that corridor, because I think the theory and I'm not an urban planner and didn't even stay at a Holiday Express last night, but I think the theory is that on cooler corridors and we use Washington Street and Florida Street as examples, that if you improve those corridors it begins to bleed out to the community. Now is that kind of a theory on something like that and so I think that the answer to your question is yes, we need to, there's a lot in that plan from 2008, a lot more than I think the public realizes that has been, it was kind of stunning to me in a meeting over at.

You can go to the plan and delineate that to the Tuesday morning group.

You were over at the meeting at St. Anthony's, they walked the guy from WVU, walked through it step-by-step, and there is a lot that's been done, but there are some cooler issues that remain to be addressed, so a lot of it does center around housing.

You're talking about the _____ buildings report?

Yes.

I've been involved in that since its inception.

I know Bob, I know you're very involved.

But here, I mean Charleston has a problem. Declining population is always going to be a problem, but the heart of any area is going to be the residence and if you don't do something to help the residents and that's what we said in 2008, you can like this plan but if it's not people oriented, what good is it going to be. And we can see the problems of the people and the residents that live in that area have

been totally ignored and so the rest of the area around the community and even inside the community has fallen apart. I mean until Charleston Housing came in over here on West Washington Street, from Powell Hardware down to ___ Avenue, Williams Street, all of those buildings were empty except a used furniture store and it used to be like 2 drug stores there, 2 hardware stores right there and drug stores, I mean it was a busy business corridor, but with the loss of population and the deterioration of the residential area, it fell apart. Because if there are no residents there to go and purchase something at those local businesses, then those businesses are not going to continue to stay there. So, I mean, there's a little bit of two theories there Bob. One theory is you've got to make a reason for people to want to live there, but with no businesses people don't want to live there. Another is.

It really is the chicken and the egg, and we have to find that balance, is the Washington corridor really really important, is 5-corners really important, or is fixing some of the houses really important, so we have to allocate, we have to balance all of that and that's we're trying to, do we need to connect the streets, do we need to build sidewalks, there's just all kinds of things we could be talking about doing on the West Side.

Yes, absolutely, sidewalks, lighting, I mean there's just so many things. I mean you can beat a dead horse forever but the gist of it is, there are problems everywhere.

What are you all hearing from your constituents that lies at the top of the list of things that need to be done.

Housing.

Mine is the fact that landlords don't take care of their property.

That's housing.

Yeah, and then the tenants that get in there, they could care less about the properties, so you know.

Because I agree.

Yeah.

I've got to leave in a minute because our hour is coming up, one of the major accomplishments that we've had is in recreation and the City has taken all the trussed money and improved the boulevard so that is one section of town where you can go over to the river, use it, and it is being used and part of our comprehensive plan when we developed the master plan for bike trails and recreation is to get this corridor, that's still on the table and I strongly recommend that as we look at the West Side that we include that as part of the plan and it carries with it the added benefit that if we could get control of the railroad line through here and down through here, part of our Master Plan.

It's huge.

Yeah, part of the Master Plan that the city has, it improves the right-of-way area which is now a jungle of trash and detracts from the neighborhood and we could take a detraction and make it an asset that would benefit the neighborhood, so.

Right.

And I think _____.

I'm not going to be in on that.

Well, I understand that, so I would like to throw that on the table so far as the plan and I think we ought to go around the table and see if other people have different ideas because I think you start at the top and then there's going to be housing and the landlord issue and things like that. If we work our way down, recreation I think is an important piece.

And I do want to do that before you leave, just to summarize, just to get that out. None of things happen in a vacuum when you're talking about a town, I mean to have good housing you have to have good recreational assets because that attracts people. To your point, you've got to have good infrastructure and it's got to be walkable. Back in 2008, you know, it's kind of become a buzz word but complete streets is the big buzz word now and it's about walkable for all people, not just for vehicles so, that's what attracts people and then the housing, so it's not just recreation, it's not just housing, it's not just infrastructure. Some might, depending on the level of problems, might rise to the top more than others but none of them occur in a vacuum, so all of these are things that need addressed. So maybe going back to you, obviously housing is at the top.

In 2008, half of the houses that CURA tore down in the past 2-3 months probably wouldn't have had to be torn down and I mean if low welfare area, I mean you have to look at that you know, the economics on a low welfare area depends on the government so to speak to handle a lot of things that people, and it talks about it in the CURA plan where the residents don't have the capability to do certain things for themselves and that's what the government is supposed to step in and help with. But as far as housing is concerned.

I'm sorry to, but some of these guys have to go to work.

Yeah, I've got to head out.

Let's go around, those of us that are retired or whatever can hang around.

I think we've covered a lot but one of the things just yesterday that I was called for on the West Side is lighting. People want to be able to go out and walk.

Safety, right.

The lighting that we did on Jackson Street, when people complained, you all remember that. We put lights on that, lit up the street, I mean they got more than they asked for, but they put blinds up, but they love it because people got out and walked and that was a safety issue, and that's one of the things.

Right, right.

People want to feel safe and there are lights that are out, street lights that are out, down particularly in this area right here, off of Patrick street and up off of Florida Street, so lighting is important for people.

Yeah, and that goes back to the safety and infrastructure.

And if people feel safe and they can get out that is one thing.

Right.

The other thing is you've got people that are living in rental property, the percentage is large on the West Side. One of the issues that you have to think about is people are also afraid of their landlords because if we say something has to be done and the landlord does it, then who pays for it, then rent goes up. So, there are ladies along Florida Street and Second Avenue and Sixth Avenue that are extremely upset because they need help with plumbing, with issues in their homes, they rent them. When I went down there, what their theory is, is that if I tell somebody, then their landlord is going to raise their rent, Pat do you agree with that. Pat, okay, Jeanine, okay, as a council person that's we hear. So it is an issue for people and it is the largest percentage of rental property on the West Side. So, there are good landlords, there are extremely bad poor landlords.

There are extremely good landlords too.

She said that.

I said that Bob. The guys that are down there I love Dem Brothers and they have done a great job. They have rental property behind them that are stealing from them, stealing from them. I know who the landlord is, but we've got to do something, not only to protect the residents from landlords but we also need to protect businesses from landlords. You just don't understand, if there is a bad property, and have her drive you around. She has a beautiful home, she lives beside of a piece of rental property that is not maintained and kept up, so get in Katie Lane's truck, I hope she is invited at some point, and Bob these places we know the history. What we're trying to do is move forward. We want the West Side to be a better place, we want North Charleston to be better, so we're trying to move forward. Okay, Andy it's your turn.

You know Katie moved.

The only thing that occurs to me is.

Katie moved.

She lives on Hall Street now.

Oh really, the only thing occurs to us because, CURA is one of the varieties in America by first of all still existing, secondly the way it's been monetized. The way it's been monetized, I think it's very much a risk, what I don't know is whether there is some out of the box ideas that might help and I'm going to speak specifically to the housing _____ and personal ownership. Is there a way we could declare _____ that took the real estate and pumped it back into the community as a way to, you know, through low interest loans or even grants perhaps, I don't know and make it short term, maybe it's a 5-year, 10 year, so it's like a home improvement mortgage or something to provide the revenue stream that could help improve the area by capping the tax base of the area and reinvesting.

Sure, I think that might work as long as the requirement was that the money taken from that area goes into that area.

Right, that's what I meant.

I'm sure it was, but I just wanted to be clear about that. We're talking about that here and there.

And I was thinking a little bit farther. One of the things we should look at is tax strategies, that is one strategy, a lot of cities cap the value when you do improvements they don't reassess your property, so that's a great strategy to put in this plan and look around the country to see what's being done, there's lots of things being done.

That's a good idea.

It's a reward system that, you know, we talk about the bad buildings, we talk about penalties for bad landlords that don't register, don't improve, let's look at ways we can make a positive change, that's all I'm saying.

Yeah, that's a good point about CURA and especially how they're monetized and that is in jeopardy, but I think that's something that we are going to be making recommendations rather it's _____ or improvement districts, there's tons of mechanisms to help bring money into an area and there will be a whole section in this report on just that very thing, so good point.

I've got a couple of frustrations, one being (everyone laughing).

If I were to guess you would have numerous frustrations.

Not counting the ones, it's the people that have buildings that don't put any money in the buildings and they operate it until they've sucked every ounce of profit out of that building without putting anything

back and just walk away from the property and let it go to taxes. And then the same thing with houses, where people just let the houses deteriorate and deteriorate and they will never tear the house down and the city has to come in and tear the house down for them and yes, we lean the property.

You're talking about abandoned properties, right.

Correct. Well I mean they're not abandoned they have ownership, I mean people.

Abandoned by the owner, right.

But these are all houses or buildings, gets permission from the property owner to tear them down, well we pay to tear the house down and we lean the property, but the property owner still retains the property, they are out nothing. The taxpayers tore the house down for them.

Yes, absolutely and something needs to change about that.

If we can, I mean we can't afford not to tear the houses down, so we have to do it, but I think you know if we're going to be spending \$8,000 to tear a house down, then we should get the title to the property.

Maybe City Council should fund a land bank, I mean that's the kind of stuff we should talk about.

Yes, absolutely.

Yeah.

And now with the City's GIS system, is getting to be more and more powerful, I think a land bank becomes, starts making a lot more sense, we could start evaluating properties and in the land banks, the successful land banks have enabling legislation that, you know, if you rebuild on the lot, it's like tip, you're not charged an increment and the taxes for ten years, while the City is given the right of refusal, so I think we need to start looking at those kinds of options.

Yeah.

Not giving these people kind of free rides, sucking up all useable use of the property and then have the City come tear your building down but you retain the land, that doesn't sit right.

And I'll sure endorse that.

Yeah, that's a good point, and back to your Andy, there's all of kind of strategies.

We need some positive change with the properties is what I'm getting at.

On the commercial side with Andy, I'll speak more as a stakeholder now that's done some progress on the West Side. You talked about, do you incentivize the property owners against an area where you've done a streetscape. On the other side, people who do redevelop projects over here, for instance with Tim ____ and his location with Girl Scouts, the same way. They were shocked when they came in and made a substantial investment in the community that the City wouldn't even put in sidewalks for, they couldn't even get sidewalks. So, on the flipside of a streetscape is maybe one of the strategies should be when somebody does make an investment, that the City makes a, CURA, or somebody makes some similar investment in the property that surrounds their investment.

In fact, the City Code makes sidewalk replacement the responsibility of the property owner.

Right, and it always floors people, they don't know it and they get to that point and they, because they think that's the least the city could do for me moving my business over here on the West Side and then they can't even get a sidewalk, that's a bit frustrating.

I really, I appreciate you guys having me, but I really have to.

The only guy we haven't heard from is Chuck.

Thanks for listening to me gripe.

Well, first of all JD didn't introduce himself, he's running for City Council at Large.

I'm going to meetings all day, if you want to come back, I'll _____.

Oh, just really quick, the point you brought up about the land, because I have a lot of neighbors who have a dilapidated property beside of them, and they would say if I could only find a way to not get just ripped off by the city or landowner, I would buy this property, but I don't, is there a way I can buy it for half, you know what I mean.

Right.

It's sitting right beside me, I mean I'll do something good with it, but it's so hard to buy it, I've got several, I've probably, I'll say 50 people in my area because they've been talking about their _____, my West Side Hill is probably one of the dilapidated properties anywhere.

Imagine if you expanded that Home ___ Program so that an adjacent property owner could buy the house and after 10 years that amount is forgiven because you know that because their an adjacent property owner, they're going to maintain it.

Right, that's what a lot of people said they would like to do and even though _____.

And that's a pretty good strategy too.

And a lot of folks that I talk to on _____, say they live on a dilapidated area, the boulevard and all, but I've talked to several people from out of state, like from Washington, DC, some of the more progressive areas and they say the boulevard is one of the selling points for them, because I always say well we, you know, we're on City Council and we spent some money here and they say well that's the greatest thing I've seen that you guys have, is fixing up that Boulevard. So as far as bringing people in, you know, looking towards the future that's good as well.

That was, getting that in place, and I can speak a little bit about it because we did the work, but that went back to your point about, not only taking advantage of our Riverfront but the lighting and one of the things when we worked on that project we did, wasn't cheap to do it, but we started and this should be a recommendation in the plan because it goes back to infrastructure, but we started converting those lights to LEDs and not only does it save the city a ton of money, but it's a heck of a lot safer, it's better light source, and the technology is out there today that as we do these infrastructure and streetscape projects, we always, wherever it is, we always upgrade the light fixtures if they're not already to LEDs and that should be one of those things as we move into further infrastructure improvement.

Is anyone hearing a need for a traffic signal on the boulevard to get access to that wonderful bike lane. I mean we could put stuff like that in the plan because you guys _____ and talk about it.

That's true.

We could put one up.

Yeah, oh it.

(Too many talking).

Thank you, guys, so much.

So, we'll see you guys at 3?

(Too many talking).

We haven't heard enough from you so you can't go yet.

I wasn't going anyway.

Thank you, gentlemen. Happy to see you.

(Too many talking).

I've got to go Bob because I have somebody waiting.

What time does this meeting go to.

Ten o'clock.

We have ____ coming in at 10, so this is kind of a 9:45 sort of, about a half an hour.

So, we didn't get, and we'd like to get your thoughts as well, we didn't really get to you.

I think, you know, whenever a project is implemented we need greater community involvement, because that gives people ownership and empowerment and might even teach them some skills too.

Right.

These are, you know, being ____ for some of the minor work.

Sure.

Anything to get people involved and then they say hey, you know, get them involved in fixing up that area, ____ to keep a better eye on the place, and.

Right, so.

It would be easier to maintain when the community feels ownership and a lot of the people that rent, which is a large portion of them, you know, it will give them something to feel like they actually have roots in the area, instead of just.

One other thing I've been thinking about that I've heard from this discussion, ways you incentivize things and help the neighborhood in general and there's something that wasn't probably on the, people are really thinking about it but, what about the data infrastructure and what if you could incentivize the neighborhood through providing access to data in that area. I know it's an issue for the school, you know they've got these iPads and the kids go home and they don't have access to be able to do their work, they don't have data, but it's just that the whole data infrastructure component, when we talk about infrastructure, probably something to think about.

Well that's a good point and that gets back to that earlier discussion on infrastructure but, and I know most people know this, but data is one of the more expensive things you can do on a streetscape. What we always try to do, like anytime we're working on a streetscape, even if the funding doesn't allow, it should be mandatory for any firm, if you're doing a sidewalk replacement or anything, to at least get the conduit banks in place, so that stuff can be installed and pulled later because conduit is.

I'd like to take it a little bit further, we have incentivized, and I know the main streets have tried on both ends of town, I think unsuccessfully, it never really worked out how they wanted it, but creating hot spots so people would start to work into those neighborhoods.

Right.

Could you do the same thing on the residential level.

You could.

Create hot spots throughout the neighborhood.

Those were recommendations when this piece was updated.

When you start to think about how do we really draw people into a neighborhood.

That's one of the things they look at.

That's a pure incentive.

Yeah, the Wi-Fi.

We're on FiberNet right now, but it's from what I can pull from memory there is actually a descent amount of fiber already in Charleston.

Right.

I believe there is a fiber line going down Washington Street, if my memory serves me correctly. You know, there's infrastructure, we just need greater public access.

Access to it, right.

Right. I mean I'm just throwing that out there as a potential.

No, no.

at one point, West Virginia had one of the largest amounts of dark fiber in the country and a lot of that is still unused. I mean I looked at the fiber map of Charleston or else it's just one big blue dot.

Right.

Which would mean greater public access.

Thinking of incentives, if you put it in certain locations like if you put it at Second Street, Second Avenue Community Center, because kids go there afterschool.

Right, exactly.

Find some specific locations that you want to attract.

Yeah, and obviously the schools.

_____.

With technology these days, you know, from what I've come across, Wireless Access Points have really come a long way, it's not like the old days where you'd have to have one like every block. You know, there are several companies that do pretty good metro area network equipment that it doesn't take as much as it used to.

And with that, do we need more community centers on the West Side, do we need more parks on the West Side, do we need more of that kind of stuff.

Yeah, more recreation.

I'd just let you talk, but I definitely think there needs to be more recreational opportunities.

I mean there was never anything put in place to replace Cabell Field, which the school was put there in terms of a large kind of big play area like that.

Right, right.

(Too many talking).

Part of it, it is you know cut off from the, but as far as having a growing nice neighborhood you need a
Is the strategy to do some neighborhood parks or a regional park, a bigger community park.

Well a little bit of both, I think that there are opportunities especially with, the only reason I know this is because I'm old and we actually did some work back in 2000 on Florida Street, but we identified early on the trusses, the opportunity with the way that trestles runs if there's ability to get that right-a-way, you could do a heck of a really nice linear greenway that kind of cuts and weaves through the entire West Side of Charleston and make that a lot more walkable and then you have little parks along that greenway or little expanded areas that.

I think those are great opportunities but what I think and this might tie into those boundaries, because you do have the North Charleston Rec Center, would it be nice to have somewhere in that area where, because the community really supports their sports leagues and the Second Avenue Neighborhood Center, you need something like that with a big playing surface for soccer, football, for those sports over there, because they used to do that at Cabell Field before the school was placed there and then the school took up the whole footprint and they didn't have the opportunity.

There's nice vacant lot right across from the Second Avenue Center, I've never heard anyone say anything about any kind of park over there, I mean I think that it didn't even exist and you've got community center right across the street that have these kids in an afterschool program, and I don't hear nobody talking about.

I know the green space you're talking about there. I don't know if it's big enough for one of those fields.

I don't think it's big enough for one of those fields,

Yea mean park.

Yeah, park.

We did that incidentally as part of our strategy when we started back in 1994 to leave the space across from the Center open with the idea that it might be needed for parking, because we at that time thought it would be a great idea to add a floor to the Second Avenue Center for creating business _____ or as time moved on, seeing kids playing football over there on that lot, it might be just a nice lot that was level and didn't have holes in it, so kids won't step in it and break their legs, they could just run up and down and maybe play soccer, play football, or whatever, or you could put playground stuff on there, but they still have that on the Center lot right across the street and then there's a vacant building right next to the end of the center that should be torn down and they could extend the play area right there with those game machines or whatever you want to call them, slides, and tunnels and stuff like that.

And that is something that this plan has addressed to some degree, they specifically mentioned the Tiskawah and Second Avenue Center as both being recreational opportunities, maybe that's something we just watch out and update it.

Tiskawah is basically out, you know because.

Right, ____ access.

But from the, maybe we just flush that out and make that one of the focal points where we do a little projects that we focus on, you know.

You talked about the Boulevard and you know give all these accolades and all this kind of stuff, well in the plan it talks about a fishing pier at the end of Florida Street, I mean is that, I've never heard anybody mention that except for a guy that lives in one of my apartments who loves to fish and he read the plan and said they've got a fishing pier in there, when is that going to happen, so I mean what would that take.

I mean I could do some residential access to it, it's a good idea.

I think that might have been one of their recommendations and I think that is a good idea to have some. I think that one of the issues that, well one they had a finite amount of money to build what they built, but I think that's a great idea. It might need to shift a little bit because I think there's a sewer outflow, do you know what I'm talking about right there, and that kind of, could ____ that idea, so.

Well along that space from Magic Island to Florida Street, surely there's an area that.

There is, yeah, and so I think recreational, there's a lot of really cool recreational opportunities for linear parks and make the whole area connect and I think that probably, just so everybody knows, that the first public meeting that's coming up here, it's going to be very, again we're there to listen, but it's going to a very good opportunity for the people there, it's going to be set up like a workshop. We're going to have stations set up and each station will deal with different things that we're talking about. One might deal with recreation and walkability, one might deal with, one will deal with housing and light and infrastructure and we'll split the crowds up and everybody will kind of shift between stations so. I think one of those stations should deal with parks and recreation. Because you all know better than others at this point. He just rattled off 3 or 4 potentials, we call them pocket parks, and then how to do you start to connect these little assets with just green space, corridors, and make the whole thing ____.

____ we don't have that confirmed yet.

I'm talking about Tiskawah.

At Washington Street, that's the area where we do the cleanup, what's that street.

Beatrice.

Beatrice, they talked about having a park, maybe putting a little park there at one time. I don't know how that's going, but that's one of the places just as far as a park, a play area. Another thing, this is going to be residential probably but, you know, every time that I travel and even here in certain, you know how when you travel you go out of town and every little area, they have their own little, I forget what you call them, but like where K-Mart is, all these little areas.

Shopping Centers?

Yeah, I'm sorry, you know a space where you have grocery stores, you don't even have to leave your area of town to do anything. I don't know how we could do a corridor, it's like, I think you guys are already thinking if it happens having a hub as far as that school going in over here, but we don't have a

hub, everywhere else has either a hospital, you know Kanawha City has their area, corridor, you know there's stuff on every side. We don't really have a hub or anything out here, to like to create.

It's scattered.

Yeah, create like activity in the area really, so.

Do you think Patrick Street could be that.

Using it as a gateway, it's kind of like,

It is.

I think that would be something that we could, I know that years ago, way, way back when they had that _____, I mean it was way, way back, they tell me about it, I wasn't there, but yeah every time I travel, I say man you don't even have to go, whether you're in your hotel.

A cluster of activity right there.

Yeah. so, that's something that would be a hub and then if that happens that may do something that creates a lot of activity over the years.

No, those are all good points. Besides Patrick Street, do you have a feel for where that might occur?

No, I mean.

Putting you on the spot there.

I had to take the risk because I've always considered before you come off the ramp to Patrick Street and make that turn, you know, you also want to focus on the residential, that side eventually, you know as soon as you come up to Patrick, right before it, that is one of those areas.

Right.

You know, and I agree, you don't want to move the focus to Patrick Street, but it seems like a tremendous missed opportunity that I go over there, just all that parking that is going unutilized and if you include _____ opportunity over there, people would come for that and then stay for the businesses.

Right, and the nice thing about it is, you've already got the bones in place because essentially the trail would fit in, that's where it terminates, so to me in my mind's eye, that was always a prime place to have a nice terminus to that trail and then it could go off and go into North Charleston or South Charleston across the bridge, but there is good opportunity for that.

I have one more observation, a number of years ago, about 5-6 years ago, I kind of did a corridor study, went out and looked at all of the vacant commercial properties and there was _____ vacant commercial properties, you know, the ones that had very bad store fronts.

Right.

You know, there were reasons they weren't rented and CURA had an economist come in, well I think it was GAI, and they basically said that the commercial was effectively filled out, there was just a low vacancy rate that kind of had uses swap in and out and to new locations. Here in the last few years the commercial industry, especially on the West Side, especially the kind of mom and pop owned businesses has just tanked and I don't know what the result is, but you know on Main Street and all those warehouse buildings down there, you know, they all had businesses in them, they were all full, they weren't like big businesses but, I mean they are awful, they are all empty now. Washington Street, a

lot of the mom and pop owned businesses are empty, but the vacancy on the commercial buildings over there is _____.

Well there are some, you know, I'm not saying that is the root cause of it, but it gets back to the, again the infrastructure argument and that was some of the suggestions made on this and they'll be some overlap, but there are a lot of problems within the public realm of Charleston. We've got a dearth of one-way streets which is essentially the death of businesses and the on-street parking or lack thereof in a lot of areas that makes it tough for businesses, especially the mom and pop, that we will need to look at it and certainly the West Side is a victim of that too, there are a lot of one-way streets that probably shouldn't be. It's not about how quickly you can get a car out of Charleston, but that is what it is about now, as opposed to, how can I make these people stop and use the restaurants and the businesses, so that's something that we'll be analyzing, you know. We're not going to be able to do a full-blown transportation study, but we'll look at a high level and may get those strategies in there to help with that. Now certainly the economy comes into play as well, but a lot of it, and we also see, you don't have to have parking in front of every business because we actually find it more beneficial to have some district areas, because it forces people to get out and walk along that block, instead of just pulling in front of a store, going in and getting back in and leaving. So, it's not all about having 100% on-street parking, but that is one of the issues that causes it.

You know we've never had a consultant that I know of, come into Charleston and have them look at our streets and access what in the world are we doing. And either with the new Civic Center, we park people and when they come out of the parking building, where do they go, they leave right on the interstate, we direct them to the interstate.

Right, how quickly can we get you out of town, right.

And these strip malls.

But that is, we've barked on that for years, that's something that we need to look at as part of the causes. Those will be recommendations as well. Well this has been very helpful and I guess we'll have another, we look forward to, if everybody did the sign in sheet, we look forward to seeing everybody at the public meeting. Did I happen to mention if he heard back.

We sent them a message.

Is that available.

We haven't heard yet.

On September 11th at 5:30.

He said he had not heard back yet as of last week.

Well we thought that would be a good place and then maybe the second one, would maybe be at Tiskawah, maybe have them in a couple of different.

Well we like to have meetings in _____, I mean we fought hard to get the name on the building, we've even fought harder to get the school right there, and we use that, we are named _____ and _____ as ground zero and that's where we concentrate our efforts and that's where our passion is and you know that's where we work and when you start talking outside of that, you know we'll do what we can to support those ideas but we have a laser focus on the area around _____ which is clearly delineated in the 2008 plan as the home ownership zone. And we tried to get them to name the whole CURA zone as a home ownership zone, because there is 883 structures, 700 and some are residential, so why not make this, they chose not to, but they gave us a little something, you know what I'm saying.

Right.

It's like we'll give them something to shut them up.

Well we will definitely have a meeting there, but I think the first one will be, it's all about, you know, this is what we're here to do, we want to listen and you all know better than I at this point and we'll start to kind of, our job is to reflect your all's comments and ideas back into this update. But I do want you to understand, I think Adam mentioned that, we're not throwing, the point of this whole exercise is not to throw the baby out with the bath water, we're not starting fresh because that doesn't do anybody any good, but with any plan, even this one, you'll want to dust it off in 2025 - 2028 and go through this exercise again because we find that they get stale, so it's an update, it's not a.

Well the man doing this plan picks up a lot, I mean it's really a very good document. I think, just my personal opinion, even some of the people I've talked to, that ____ gave more credit for CURA for doing stuff than what we actually feel and should have gotten and then he prefaced this statement by saying that although they've done a lot seemingly, it hasn't been the stuff that the people, the residents really expected, needed, or wanted. So, we were kind of mystified by his comments, but it came out in the paper like that and then after reviewing this document, you know, and as you understood the CURA document, then you knew that that was kind of sugar coating what CURA had done and what they hadn't done. An Ron is new here, you know, he probably thinks I'm very hard on him, but I mean you know if you lived in Charleston when CURA dismantled the Triangle District and how they did it and what the fight was and you lived through that and now, then you live through 40 years of nothing almost, and then you put your name on the line and say in 2005-06 you going to start this, man look CURA is not the same CURA that dismantled the Triangle District, this is a new group of people, we really want to work with these people, we really can trust them, they have our best interest at heart, let's go to the meetings, let's work with them putting this plan together. I mean me and Wallace did that and had 60-70 people come to different meetings all over the West Side at that time and then to sit back and wait 4-5 years and nothing happen, then you kind of get disillusioned and people look at you cross-eyed and say we did all that for what.

Well, I think I understand that. I would ask that, like I said, it's a new CURA group and you know we want to, we have your interests, we want to get everybody's input and come up with the best report.

I think unfortunately Ron's predecessor didn't do a good job at managing expectations and I think there is an expectation that you know that hundreds of millions of dollars are going to come pouring into the West Side community renewal plan and it's going to happen in six months and.

And property taxes and all kinds of stuff.

So, yeah change never comes fast enough.

Ten years.

But I think if we can find some good vehicles like you said, different strategies for getting some money coming into here, that should be a big part of this plan. Then we actually could get some project moving. One of the other things that we want to do in this study and we again rely on the public to tell us that, the study itself is just strategies and it addresses all these things we've talked about, but one of the things that we do like to do and this should make you happy, is we always like to zoom in, like if the report is a 10,000 foot view of things, we like to zoom in and come up with 3 or 4 actual, and identify, and we'll talk about it at the first public meeting or start to identify these, is we like to on these things come up with 3-4, we call them catalytic projects, where we zoom in a little bit more and say, here are 3 or 4 projects across this district that we would like to see immediately get going and then it lets CURA, or whatever funding source, start to focus on making this happen. So, we're not sitting here 10 years from now, you know, with nothing being done and we find that with anything like that, your momentum starts and so if you can start to get 3-4 projects going then it's a lot easier to keep it going. So, we do want to identify and I'm sure everybody has a few in their head already, you know, we might want to identify a block and show what.

Why does everybody say that, I mean everybody always talks and says, we might want to start on a block, but I like the concept and I was relatively excited and happy about it after the last CURA meeting, based on what sounded like was going to happen. Then when you get 2 weeks down the road

and you talk to people and basically, they don't have any more information now than they did at the time the announcement was made at the meeting. What appeared in the paper which brings up the _____ of the people in the community that something is getting ready to happen and then they question you about, well where is my on-ramp and when can I get an application and you make sure my name is on the list, and you know I mean, we've lived this.

Bob, let me ask you a question. Now this new CURA thing, want to go for that particular area. Now I differentiate a lot between personal responsibility and between a business flourishing off of this so the people, so here is my thing, okay. If CURA makes money available and the people don't come and use it, that's going to be even worse, so.

I will give you a list of 10 people who own homes on the West Side, who would fill out the application and go through the process today.

We don't know what the guidelines are yet so we can't say that those people are going to qualify. We have to figure out what _____ already does so we don't overlap, we'll get there but it's not happening in 2 weeks it's going to take us more weeks.

But it is something that's going to happen, I mean.

And the board did not identify an amount and that's frustrating to the Tuesday morning group, but they basically said they liked the idea and understand that something needs to happen, we need to evaluate our revenue sources, what we're spending money on, the laws unfortunately are a giant elephant out there that has a huge impact on us and they're going to allocate some money but they don't have those numbers yet. So, they asked me basically to go figure out what the guidelines might be and makes no sense to do, and you've got to come back to them and say here is how it would possibly would work. And City Council has to authorize the _____ to even help work with the _____.

Right, I want to make sure because I get questions on that as well, I want to make sure that people when they ask me is there some money coming or whatever, then I'm like, you know, I want to make sure that the process and like you say it overlaps with MOECV or even get that Chips money or discount.

What we hope to do is go back to CURA on September 12, or whenever the next meeting is, then go to City Council, the first meeting after that with an MOU with MOECD, that doesn't happen during the process, does it?

I don't think so, I mean. In the requests, since we're talking about that, I guess it's okay, that in our minds the money from CURA, are going on the same guidelines as West Invest and I mean West Invest when it first started to was like you write a police officer a check for \$25,000 out of CURA, \$25,000 out of Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation and you know go have fun buying you a house, build you a house, whatever and then after several years during the process, we come to find out that maybe we need a little more structure here and we need some more guidelines to follow and basically if you talk to the people at MOECD, those guidelines have basically been written and those were the guidelines that the Tuesday morning group was requesting that we follow for the administration of the funds of you know what we're talking about.

And those don't exactly work, so there's a little process that has to occur, we're not going to just start handing out checks and so we're working to get to that process as quickly as we can.

You know what would be good and I know we had a meeting scheduled with you, you couldn't come to for whatever reason, but now that we've moved further along down the road, is it a possibility that you could come to a Tuesday morning group at the request of Rev. _____, that's in conflict with something else on the schedule, and tell us exactly where we are with this process and then it will make it easier to talk to the people from the community and start to get things prepared. Because one of the things that I look at, with the \$500,000 that you all gave to the City to tear down buildings, black hands got none of that money, \$500,000, wasn't one dollar went to a black person and if it did I would like to know who it was and how much it was and so you cannot raise the level of the people in an area if they

never get economic opportunities that come into that area. And then if you look over the past 4-5 years since the school was built, it was almost \$300 million spent right there on the West Side community and black people didn't make a dime or dollar, start a business, get a job or nothing. So, I mean the frustration of the area and the people that live there, is getting to a point of exploding because I mean you see \$300 million being spent, I mean you would say that some of that ought to land in somebody's hands that I know and it didn't and why is that. I mean you wasn't here for all of that, but you know, the school, hospice, different other things, like Mountain Mission, I mean we had them all listed, delineated and all that stuff, but all this stuff is happening right there where we are but it's not impacting the people that live there or who would like to live there or who are associated with the area. I am actually _____ within this plan, maybe one of the discussions is how do we incentivize our area owned businesses, I've tried to give you all a plan to do that and you all simply turn me down completely in two situations and told me that I didn't understand what you all were saying when I was trying to say, you're not understanding what I'm saying. And the none of the Commissioners thought enough of what I presented to say well let's sit down and talk about this. Not one, and I went to Jack Kavander and met with him at his office twice and I met with you and your office and I met with you in a coffee shop, but nobody has really try what I was saying because when we did what we did, starting in 1994, it was a job development and formal creation program and we were using, developing houses, economic development driver and everybody knows my name and everybody know that I built a bunch of houses, own a bunch of houses, but I ain't seen nobody say how can I help you.

Let me ask you this question, has any minorities gotten any money from CURA over there to do anything with.

Well Watts got some money to tear down some buildings, that was in 2012 or something.

Chuck, I think you know that the city has a contract that they bid every couple of years, a demolition contract.

Well during that process, we had a guy that had gone to school to become an excavator operator, he had a excavator, it was right there on the site for 2.5 months and he couldn't do nothing, because the city had this obligation with somebody else, this was a black guy, I mean things like that, they frustrate you and they continue to build. There are rules and regulations that are set up by the governmental structure that is over that area and if the people who are in those positions don't act to do things that help the people, then they are not doing their job.

My point is, things that we're talking about, like the bids that were done, that's like state law, that's not the city.

State law, I don't understand what you're talking about.

The state, we're required to accept, generally required to accept the lowest bid.

But you are required to also advertise it, so everybody has a chance to.

Of course, you are, and I believe, I have reason to believe this is done.

Right, and the work you bid on that work.

But I think, there are ways, maybe not with that contract, but generally speaking, ways to engage the people in the neighborhood.

Well I agree with that.

We could make that a priority.

I agree with that, I just mean we are constrained by state law and certain ways the contract.

Public money.

With public money there are all kinds of rules and regulations.

Ron, I'm going to tell you right now, I'm in the process, I started a new business, it's a development company and my goal is to find black contractors and black construction workers and first of all identify who they are and then help them get qualified to do the things that they need to do to be able to bid on contracts or in the situation we're in right now with whatever money you all are going to provide, for these guys to be able to go out and competitively bid on these projects to do stuff on people's houses right there in the neighborhood, because it hurts my heart to think that maybe you all bring \$500,000 in there as was proposed in the meeting and then the next thing you're going to see is truckloads of white guys coming in to work on these people's houses and black guys walking up and down the street not know what they can do or what they should do and not having any opportunity to get some work and try to understand how this process works and maybe start a business. Because one of the things that I've tried to espouse over the years is that everybody, everybody needs to know how to be self-employed, because I don't think there is too many more jobs where you're going to go on one day and in 40 years they are going to give you a watch and a great pension, so we need to be teaching people how to become self-employed and electricians, carpenters, HVAC guys, plumbers and all that, these guys hang their own shingles and we see trucks running all over the city right now and in 2001, I wrote a program to teach people how to be housing technicians which is summarized as the good old fashion handy-man and you know then 2 or 3 years later, we see all these handy-man trucks on the street, of course, you see less of them now because the process that they put these people through really didn't add up, you know, they give you good advertising, but they didn't do too much else for you. But the program that I'm talking about is you bring these people in, these bad houses, demo them or deconstruct them to a point and then rebuild them and we have done several houses like that, in fact I'm working on one right now. You take everything out of it that you can possibly take out of it and you put everything in it back new. You maybe change the floor plan to fit what is better now than what it used to be and put modern stuff in there, do heating and air conditioning, modern kitchen, all this stuff, but this stuff costs money. But the idea was to raise the value of the properties in that area to at least \$75,000. The average appraisal value of every house in that area, and that was in about 2005, in 1996, that we wrote the 2nd Avenue restoration, I think it was 1994 that we wrote the 2nd Avenue restoration proposal, you know, I have pictures I was going to bring you, but we started that.

I think it's a great thing you're doing.

I haven't done anything in 10 years.

I'm getting ready to wrap up this one.

Let's take a break.