

## Group 2 Business and Developers

Just quickly go around the room. I'm Dave Gilmore, I'm director of Planning, Landscape Architecture at GAI and maybe just go quickly around the room. I know most of you, but just in case, Mark.

I'm Mark \_\_\_\_\_, I work with Lewis Glasser in my \_\_\_\_\_ of development, a lot of investment, and also \_\_\_\_\_ reservation law and issues discussed with any council and I founded the West Side Neighborhood Association in 1996 that led to the creation of Main Street \_\_\_\_\_.

Great, thanks for coming and doing all that good stuff.

Mike \_\_\_\_\_, I'm here on the West Side, I invest in building and houses on the West Side for the past 37 years and I'm also owner of Professional Plumbing Supply on the West Side here. We just moved to the new location about a year-and-a-half ago, updated the building down there, 703 Washington Street, and I've got a lot of money invested on the West Side.

Congratulations on that, happy to have you.

A lot of good insight too.

My name is John Butterworth, I just bought 3 toilers from him and.

The number one and number two business.

Yeah, yeah.

You've got to think about that one.

Yeah, you can use that. I'm the West Side Neighborhood Planner for the City of Charleston.

I'm Kathy Callahan, and I'm on Main Street Board and Family \_\_\_\_\_.

Perfect, thanks Kathy.

I'm Mark Taylor, Charleston Housing and Charleston Main Street Board of Advisors.

Wayne Duncan, property owner and resident on the West Side.

I'm \_\_\_\_\_, I just moved from the West Side after 40 years, but I'm still here in Charleston, downtown now but I am on the Main Street Board of the West Side and for the entire Main Street and a member of the CURA Board.

I'm William Butler with CURA and in a minute or two Adam will come in, he is having a meeting, but he will be here in a second.

I'm Patty Folan, presently consulting with GAI.

I'm Bob Hardy and I'm a member of Tuesday Mornings with Charleston Branch and I'm \_\_\_\_\_.

I'm James Yost and I know most of you at the table, it's good to see everyone again. I am also recording these meetings so I can take detailed minutes.

So just quickly and I'm going to turn it over to Ron for a minute, to leverage your time as best we can, what we're starting to do is update the old community plan that was done, I believe it was 2008 and so this is really kind of kicking it off. We are here to listen so this is probably the most you're going to hear me say. This is kind of set up, there will be a series of public meetings, the first one starting up in a couple of weeks, but these are kind of more focused interviews with likeminded individuals and we actually have them scheduled over the next two days, so we will be doing this tomorrow and Friday

and when you guys are probably out having a beer we'll still be setting here doing this, but this is the second one. I had a really good meeting this morning at 8 o'clock so I hope we can pull some good information out of you. The idea is that this is going to be informal. We are here to listen so we're going to let it organically grow, but before we start, I think it might have been you, Paula, it occurred to us and you might not even know why or understand why we're even here, or what this is about or even the history. So, just briefly because we're getting a little bit of a late start, maybe Ron could kind of talk about CURA's role and what the goal is of what we are trying to do here.

Ron: CURA was established since 1952, this is the current West Side CURA \_\_\_ Plan, it was recently approved in 2008. We are revisiting the plan. There are things that were being done/that weren't being done. Most plans don't survive realistically 10 years, which is a long time for a plan, even though I think it was smart when it was put together, they need to get relooked at occasionally. So, we are looking at this plan. CURA is a very rare urban renewal authority in the country that does not receive tax dollars. We're funded through both leases on commercial spaces downtown and land lease payments under the Town Center Mall. As you all know that's a bit dicey right now. I don't think it's going away, but it certainly is going to change. So temporarily, our funding sources are a bit risky, so we wanted to say that because as we look at this plan, we would love to hear from you what you think would make the West Side better, what are some of the problems, should we look at expanding the boundaries, if we expand the boundaries, CURA's funding doesn't increase, so you start having a deletion issue. Should we shrink the boundaries? We are open to every kind of idea that you have, that you see, should we be focused on getting people to live here, should we be focusing on business, attract some people and create some jobs, anything or everything is open and on the table. At the last meeting we talked about things that City Council could do, should we look at tax strategies, etc. So, we would love to hear anything and everything that you have in mind. What I would like to do is keep it somewhat high level. Let's not talk about 501 that has weeds in the yard, let's talk about incentives and penalties and behavior that we want kind of thing. So, you are welcome to ask questions at any time.

Dave: The consultants will speak right now, we're going to react and just like the first meeting it went over because we found that we kicked it off and then it just went. So, we hope this won't apply to you folks, so maybe I'll start with you Mark. Are there any higher reaching things that just come to mind initially that you would like to get out on the table?

Mark: First thank you all for calling and bringing this, because it's always important to have these forums and to continue to discuss. Let me re-associate a little bit. I thought about this this week.

1. First, when I was City Council I was on the Urban Renewal Authority Committee and we're an odd case, I think. I think the Urban Renewal Authority and the City also needs to think about being more leveraging some federal dollars. I think this idea is a legacy of the cities failure to decide that they need to take advantage of some more significant opportunities at the federal forces. Charleston has failed to do that. Charleston is leaving money on the table. Appalachia is the theme of the decade right now and we're not taking it. Charleston is supposed to be the capital of Appalachia and it's not acting that way.

2. The West Side, it's 40% of the population or 35% population of the City and it represents a huge amount of residential/commercial development and it has been ignored. When I was on City Council, I actually dared to say that the allocations of CURA resources at that time was lop-sided, it was 95% to 5% at that time. It's changed a lot, so congratulations. I got in trouble for saying that, but I was pitting the East, where I live, against the West Side, which I thought was bizarre. So that must change. Charleston is not territorially growing and so you have to treat the West Side, it is historically important, it's the core mass, it's flat. I think it's a place where people could and would want to live.

3. Diversity is a problem for Charleston and Charleston has to take extraordinary steps to include people who live on the West Side, people black, white and otherwise. It needs to happen and it's not happening, still not happening. People are being demonized in the communities for simply expressing concern about what is going on there.

4. We, my brothers and I, were instrumental in getting the Luna Park Historic District off the ground. It is underperforming as far as investment is going right now and I don't know why. I think a large part of this is they have lack of education, lack of leadership on the cities part to leverage resources into those areas that are related to historic preservation. There are 440 historic buildings in the Luna Park Historic District. It is absolutely the right opportunity to reinvest in our residential neighborhood.

6. I think the floodplain issue is a real problem, no one seems to think about it. I think we need to target why when you're in a floodplain and parts of the West Side are in the floodplain, it's a 100 year plain, there are flood insurance requirements that are deterring investment because if you get a loan you have to get it flood insured. Everybody knows this that gets flood insurance, it's a real big problem. I've been told that FEMA re-evaluates the floodplain, it's going to actually insurance. I just don't see advocates for us and in your department, I just don't see it. I think it needs to be studies and targeted because I don't think it should be in the floodplain according to people I've talked to. Because that is deterring investment.

There are simple steps that aren't being taken. In the comprehensive plan for example, Randolph Street for four blocks to Delaware Avenue and Virginia Street are one way on both sides, been some talk about becoming two-way.

Dave: Yeah, we have talked about it.

I am the only person right now who is actually walking the street and asking business owners and property owners do you want to make it a two-way street, there are so many on either side, this would cost almost nothing and you're talking about bringing direct access and flow into the parts that you want to redevelop. And that's simple and no one is working on it.

Dave: Just to react to a couple of things. I think that we talked about it a little bit earlier, the one-way streets, and this came out when we updated this strategic plan is, this is a problem all over Charleston, it's about how quickly can we get cars out of town. It's moronic and there's a lot of one-way streets that should be converted. Another thing is off-street parking or on-street parking that doesn't really help out the business owners. You don't necessarily have to have on-street parking in front of every business but if you can create some district parking, we find it is better for people to get out, because they are willing to walk one or two blocks and service those businesses. Sometimes it is better than having a parking spot in front of a business, where you get out, go into the business, and get back in your car and leave. That's not a lot better than having a one-way street. So, these are things that we want to look at, especially from a business standpoint. But also talked about and Patty is much more well versed in this, there will be a whole section in this plan that deals with the financial analysis, economics, and you're right, things are certainly dicey with CURA right now because of the white elephant in the room being the fate of the Town Center and how they are incentivized. It was also brought up and I agree with you Mark, we have done a terrible job in Charleston until recently like with the TIF which has funded our \$100 million-dollar Civic Center Project and you can see the power, and I'm not saying we do a TIF, but there are other vehicles as well, even for different types of improvement districts. Do you want to hit on a few of those?

Patty: First I want to hit on one with FEMA and the floodplain. I'm not well versed in getting that redefined, \_\_\_\_\_.

Mark: It would be exceptionally expensive.

There are areas the probably through stormwater improvements could be improved but it's not going to be the big magic wand. To me, the barriers to redevelop it, when you're talking about existing structures, when we're talking about new development, like the infield that you guys did on second, you know there were some parameters that had to be done to get those removed, but you were able to hit that bar right.

It's an expensive proposition.

It is.

It's not available to the average home owner.

We there are construction standards that can usually overcome those issues and I would love for this not to be the hurdle in the way of development, but at the end of the day if there is some bona fide flood risk there, then insurance is part of the litigation plan, to make sure that we have.

The point is these discussions are not taking place.

They ought to.

There are a couple of things, there is no sense of urgency. The city is suffering, I mean everybody is doing wonderful work, but there just seems to be no sense of urgency on policy and ways to invest on policy perspective, I'll give you another example, stormwater retention in WV is higher than federal level and all the city has to do is go into and say we want to change this and developers can save tons of investment. It's not necessary for infrastructure to retain water, but nobody seems to want to do it.

That's a really good point.

It's a great point and I'm frustrated. I know a major developer in Charleston who abandoned it because the standard was too high.

You're talking about the MS-4 requirements.

The MS-4, so WV has unilaterally said we're going to ignore the federal standard, we're going to be higher, because we want to spur all of this investment. Well it's ridiculous and there is no advocacy on the policy side.

A couple of other points would be zoning reform. I do a lot of land lease and I know that the City, I mean I love our department, there are great people there, I just think there's no sense of urgency to really dig in and to say we really have to reform how we are going to deal with these small-town lots. John will tell you what happens to reforms. We have small town lots that are non-conforming lots, under most of our zoning orders, nobody is going to rebuild on them. The idea that you can rebuild on these lots is ridiculous and then when you add the floodplain and flood insurance issues and the modern building code issues and the fact that you're trying to redress historical property. You're going to continue to lose these properties unless we figure out a way to get people to drive investment to them. Ron and I have a meeting set up later to help a little bit on that. But those are a few of the things. Leadership needs to address this. With new leadership coming in, maybe they will. It has to happen, if you're not going to do it with urgency, then forget about it.

Dave: Let me ask you something on that, is that urgency a direct result of we're kind of in a lame duck situation here where we've got a new, or is this a past historical one?

The reason it has been ignored and I had the West Side, there was a councilman who left who criticized me 10-15 years ago for saying that CURA wasn't spending enough money on the West Side and it's in his district, so go figure. It's a political issue. I don't care if that's what he wants to do, but he's not representing his district when he was advocating for not more money from CURA. And everybody looks to CURA, they think it is the golden goose, well it isn't. But there are a lot of policy things we could do to, and I've talked to foundations about forming capitol to invest in the West Side, but you know I can't get people to talk to me.

We're going to spend a lot of time in the report on that and I don't know Patty if you just want to hit on a few of those ideas.

I would rather hear what he has to say.

Like I said I have to apologize and go, but I love all of you, you guys are great, I have no problem, you guys are great. You all are working hard, but I think the leadership needs to step it up.

So, can we address the issue of urgency without getting into a diatribe.

I think that is a legitimate comment, I think we have some political, provided we all understand that the urgency could be greater.

We could set an example of urgency, or lack of urgency. There are some situations on the table, right here, right now, today that demonstrate the fact that they City leadership dos not act with any degree of urgency towards doing things on the West Side.

I agree with that.

Two weeks ago, CURA committed, sort of, money to the West Side to help residents improve the outside of their homes or money to incentivize people to want to buy a house in those areas. And I know two weeks is not a lot time, but when you're dealing with a situation that is 10 years old, when you get that kind of information and two weeks later nobody can tell you where it's moved since that meeting, that shows a lack of urgency in getting this money out to the community that it was committed to.

I'm going to predict that the West Side, particularly the flats will be the place to be.

Because it's flat and we don't have a lot of that. Charleston is, and another reason is we don't have a lot of recreational assets is because we have a finite amount of land, we are stuck by a river and an interstate and that's it a very linear town and so when property does become available, it usually gets gobbled up for development and not necessarily recreational assets because they don't necessarily make money. So, there are those opportunities and I think I agree with Mark, it could potentially be the next big thing.

I think we're messing up the City and CURA here. CURA is not the City and so a lot of the comments he was making, there all great comments, he's a very big thinker, but a lot of that is City stuff to.

Let me clarify, this plan is not just a CURA plan, this is a plan for everybody, so what we're going to put in the plan, the City could help with XYZ and its helps them with some political cover to go do that.

Yeah, I think a lot of that goes back, a lot of people misunderstand CURA's role and they see it as the good laying the golden egg thing.

The taxpayer funded thing.

Right,

What's the meeting today, what are we here to discuss? Is it CURA and West Side Main and West Side Development, is that what. Give me a parameter here?

This group is the Main Streets, the Business Owners, and Developers on the West Side District.

I'm a developer and I've got a lot of money invested into the West Side, so I have a great interest in anything that happens over here on the West Side. I see prospects on the West Side Main Street, it has cleaned up a lot, and I like a lot of things I'm seeing down through there. Last year I bought a new building on Washington Street, the old \_\_\_\_\_Hut down to the new location. It's been great for us and I see a lot of positive things. The building beside of me is owned by \_\_\_\_\_ Plumbing Company, a national company. They painted their building and prettied it up. The older apartments and houses on the West Side, they are cleaning them up, adding new windows and roofs and painting them. So what I did with my building, and I'm not finished with the outside yet because I started running out of money on this stuff, it's kind of like a domino effect, when you clean up something, we put a 1919 bathtub out front, put flowers in it, and people were pulling the flowers out of them, throwing them out into the street,

and I added a camera to watch them and they quit, and now the flowers are growing and nobody is bothering them. So, it's a mindset and you want people to think positive and not negative. There's a rough looking crowd up and down Washington Street. It's not a positive thing if people are coming in and looking to either do business with me or to buy a home on the West Side. I don't know the answer to cleaning that up.

Does Washington need to be two-way?

It is where I'm at. Toward the interstate, I hadn't even thought about it, I mean I don't know. I don't know what it would hurt, I'm kind of thinking that would help because right now on Lee Street, Quarrier Street, you can go one way west or east a block apart and that's definitely good for traffic flow. Washington Street is one way to the tracks then it becomes a two-way and there's no way to fix that any different. I don't know what the founding fathers' way back when decided to make all those streets one-way, I don't know what they were thinking. It obviously works pretty good. Like in front of the Clay Center, you guys like that, they made it two-way.

As a planner, no transportation engineers look at it one way and planners and \_\_\_\_ look at is another and transportation engineers look at how quickly can I get a car from A-to-B.

The through put and the quality of that.

In our new building, the two-way is good for us businesswise. I've got traffic going two directions, I was at Maryland Avenue on a one-way corner and down there, we didn't know you guys were here, and I wanted to up a nice big sign so people could see, but the City wouldn't approve that sign without things I had to do. So, before we spend \$12,000 on a sign, it has to be useable, it can't be down below.

Maybe we should look at signing on the West Side, the City code relaxed for signing for business.

Without signs you don't even know that they are there.

That's exactly right.

I mean I don't want Kanawha City, where you have 45 signs either, but it's a balance.

That's one thing that's a very tiny elephant in the room, but like in the Community Renewal Plan there is actually zoning provisions built into it, some of which are sign code right, that was a holdover from the era where CURA was doing land use stuff and it's my suspicion that that probably won't stay over, if you guys got rid of it in the downtown plan.

I would hope not, it's antiquated at best.

Yeah, any recommendations for changes to be made, the City Zoning Code for this area pretty much mirrors what CURA adopted but that's not \_\_\_\_.

What could we do to incentivize businesses to locate on the West Side. What would help them thrive on the West Side, the local residents.

Well residents, I don't think a residential, there are plenty of people down there.

Think of all kinds of things that could happen. Do you want a bench out front on the sidewalk, do you want park, a parking lot behind you?

Well I had a bench and had people sleep on it.

That's a risk absolutely.

A bench would not be a plus. Just clean up. This clean up down trough there.

That came up a lot.

It's improved greatly over the last 3-5 years but between my building and Pile Hardware, there's a lot of empty store fronts and it looks bad and some of the old buildings don't need refurbished, they need bulldozed. The best thing for a lot of the West Side would be \_\_\_\_\_.

There are a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ over there.

There are a lot of D9's (?), pile some diesel fuel on it and be done and new development because like you said, it's level land and if you had all your infrastructure there. I have 2.5 acres on Bigley Avenue, bought a bunch of old houses and properties and I've been tearing them down slowly but surely and it's already got the storm sewer for the City, the interstate, it's got commercial power for gas and all the stuff up there, and I have someone that wants to develop it. I was going to develop it but I'm getting too old, but I haven't found a developer that wants to take a chance and I'm not sure why, because it's a unique property in Charleston, 2.5 acres with 500-foot frontage on the interstate, two exits in front of it and if you go out into the middle of nowhere, Idaho and anywhere in the country, there are hotels, motels, and restaurants and this is two blocks from the Civic Center and 3 blocks from the Town Center Mall. and it would be a wonderful thing for Charleston. I don't know if you've ever looked at it or not.

where exactly is that.

800 Block of Bigley Avenue, past Kelly's Men Store. The old Purity Made factory, you know where it's at, here's Kelly's, here's Purity Made and I own this block here and there you've got an interstate exit here, but I mean that one piece of property could change how people see Charleston. I suggested people off the interstate have a Visitors Center or something like that.

That came up in our last.

I mean it's a big piece of property and I've invested, been buying it since 1983, one piece at a time, playing monopoly, I'm trying to buy more, and most people think I'm Walt Disney buying up real estate and tripled the price.

Well that came up in the last group to that there's not really a community, I guess you could call it a strip mall, but we don't want a strip mall, but a place that people could go and collectively shop and more of a Town Center.

The West Side Main Street is getting pretty cool, a lot of things happening, this could be an entertainment district and what he said about the West Side becoming something different in 10 years, this could be the beginning of it. See it would change the complexion of coming into Charleston, instead of a bunch of old houses and apartment buildings, you'd have a new, something like Huntington put downtown.

Primarily it's a gateway on this side of town.

It's a crossroads, even more of a gateway to the City, but it's a crossroad to every interstate and major highway, it's a crossroads project.

And that's the thing I think about, I think the City is missing a really big opportunity to get people off the interstate by not giving them something visually to look at, like that little district in \_\_\_\_ City, it is so unique that I have to stop and get off the interstate for an hour or two and get a place that people want to stop. When you drive by at night, you see something very unique and you get off the interstate, there's no other place in the city that can do that. The East end is lost because you start distancing yourself on the interstate. But a city district right beside the interstate, I mean it is there, it's visual.

And the East End already has a built-in gateway in the form of a big golden dome.

I met years ago with the Civic Center Director, John Robertson, he suggested over there, when people come to the Civic Center for all these concerts and events, he said in the evenings they don't have a place to go, Capitol Street and he said that my property all the way down Washington Street, he said that would be fabulous where Kelly's Men Store is and all that in there for an entertainment district to get people off the interstate and get them interested and if that happened then the West Side would just explode down there. But you've got to have ignition to get it an explosion.

Right, start somewhere.

At one time Bigley Avenue was the second busiest street.

I hadn't heard that.

Bigley Avenue was the second biggest intersection and when my grandfather bought Valley Bell, it was the Hobby Center, it definitely was. I mean the traffic was non-stop.

That was in all of downtown right.

In all of downtown and I mean it was, even back in that time period, the West Side was, \_\_\_\_\_ who was an editor of the Gazette, he did that convenient website. One thing we've worked on a lot was Main Street but we never can seem to make it, it's that pocket in between, we've never figured out how to make the flow go from Elk City, it's only natural for the city to build out and how to get it past Elk City down to the lower West Side. You did a great thing, because that filled in a little bit of that pocket but there's still that area right after the railroad tracks that. One of the problems is the water that comes off Rainelle, I mean there has been several times that that flooded. That stuff just needs to go away.

I think the property owners there are not realistic about letting their property go for the value. Because we've called about some of that property and we were just.

And they are not realistic about it, but they also, where that Tobacco Warehouse is, right past the railroad tracks, and they own the Gresham Building and then there's like a little 7-11 type market that is just past the railroad tracks and then they own where the old Sonoco Station.

No, they don't own that.

They're going to want millions of dollars for that.

But that's a pocket, if all of that went away and something was there, that is something that would definitely pull people down past the railroad tracks. This is not anything new. Back when it used to be a Business Association and my mom and dad, and Kelly's, and Freeland Furniture, this was there problem, anytime they did events, of course, they didn't have Main Street or anything at that time, but they had the same problem, everything ended at the railroad tracks so no longer how much they tried to include the other end, it just kind of stopped.

The prices are totally unrealistic, you will never be able to buy it.

This property right there, the traffic count, it's 165,000 cars a day, the last time I checked right there. it's the busiest part of the highway here.

And another realistic thing would be if you've ever sat on the, if you want the outdoor patios or whatever to develop on Bigley is to funnel the big trucks to come down and straight out on Pennsylvania Avenue and down Washington, not get off and come down Bigley. So that's something.

Washington Street is U.S. Route 60.

But there's no reason for them to come down Bigley when they can come out beside of Kelly's and come down. That is just a minimal thing. One other thing, I feel like parking, but to me it blocks. You have these big SUVs, it blocks the businesses, Back Stage Body Ware, I hardly see them because there's all these big things parked in front of them, so when you're driving down the street, you don't visually see when you have parking always right in front of the business district. Until the whole plan is developed and really have their feet in the area, they aren't just going to walk around and discover these places.

Right. On street parking, we harp on it and it's important and two-way streets are important, not always but sometimes it's better like I said to have little district areas to park, where it forces people to get out.

I don't want to have to walk 3 blocks.

Studies show that that is about the limit. But we find that a two-block area and that encourages people to use multiple businesses instead of pulling in front of one then going in and leaving.

The average person will walk it, but unfortunately.

It's Charleston, right.

Exactly we are spoiled.

I saw somebody get in a car the other day on Summers Street, we are downtown and they got in their car and went up 4 spaces and parked and got back out and I thought what in the world, you know, but we see that all the time.

I'd like to offer maybe a different way to think about this very linear strip of Washington Street and I guess the conversation today is maybe about the lower part. I think bridging the continuity across them maybe a fool's errand. I think that the development fabric is great enough that connecting them back into a walkable manner is not where our resources ought to be paid, but I do think that you have a really good node of walkable business. No one is going down the street and saying oh I'll buy a toilet today, I mean that's not.

That's a destination.

Right and what we need on the lower West Side is the let's go take a stroll and the cup of coffee or the sandwich or you know look for a birthday gift for so and so, those sorts of things and I think that focusing on two nodes of Washington Street and looking for more destinations like auto development, auto style development in the middle, I think we throw millions and millions of dollars at that.

Well and it's far enough apart that it's not really a walkable.

I'm not walking from Elk City to Patrick Street. I'm not even going to do that.

There are pockets that could be developed into a recreational area. Across from Stonewall, that whole block across from Stonewall where the supply that used to be, that big humongous building, I mean I don't know how anything can go in there and realistically, that's probably one of those things that needs to go away and then you would have this big block and I don't know how historic the buildings are from Stonewall back, I don't know if those are historic, I don't think they are, but if you look at that, like you said demolish it, then you have a whole block that you could develop and kids do bring family, but it brings people to the area and they spend the day eating, drinking, spending time.

Right. One of the things I agree with John about the continuity thing, I think Bob brought this up, the streetscape does need to be addressed but one thing we do when you have a very long corridor like this is that I'm all about continuity but that's not to say that, especially in a long corridor like this, that you can't have a different vibe throughout the city than you do on the West Side. It's still a nice streetscape, but it can kind of its own kind of streetscape with different site furniture, even lighting

and I think a lot of people just try to throw a dart and one size fits all and sometimes you want that identity because like you said nobody is going to walk from Gonzo Burger to Charleston Department Store.

And you do have Charleston Department, Grisham, and Powell that are destination places, so the pockets in between there.

The difference in walkability between the two is the topography. In this area, everything is glass, you can park two blocks away and walk. On that end, it's straight uphill and you start to walk down and people don't like to walk hills, so it's all just that strip of Washington where you are getting people to walk.

Of course, the key to everything, when there are people on the streets, then your drugs go away or they move somewhere else, it may not solve it but they go somewhere else and it solves it for us and then that increases people wanting to live in the houses and upkeep their houses and it brings a different home owner to the area.

The other areas between Central and Main, I know Bob and I have talked about this on several occasions, and \_\_\_\_\_ is making an investment with CURA's help there, a hydroponic facility and the hope is to renovate the facility there, but that area is highly unutilized and probably better physical shape than the lower end of Washington Street. Most of those buildings are, the roofs are intact and those sorts of things, they are by in large much more turn key. At one point in history, that was a very thriving business area and it's kind of really stagnated and so that I think is free for investment.

Are you saying businesses like the warehouses or you see it as an entertainment district?

I think that's probably more where the public input needs to be. I've heard Bob talk about dance halls and all sorts of stuff right in that area in years past. I mean it's really more how the community wants to use it today, I mean I don't know that.

Is this kind of the lower West Side underserved? I mean more sandwich shops, dry cleaners, things like that.

What the West Side needs is a manufacturer or somebody that hires about 1,000 people and that would clean up the West Side all by itself. All the sudden a lot of things go away.

You're talking about we need business and we do, who is going to identify a local person down there with the desire to own a local business and then give them the resources to try to get it off the ground because I can tell you from somebody with resources, it's not easy to get this thing off the ground, it takes years and lots of cash flow.

This is what the strip center, the Drug Emporium has provided, the young woman who started Cafe Creamer right, if she didn't have an easy to occupy kind of turn key little space that she could start her business in, it wouldn't have happened because she didn't have the resources to do a \$50,000 renovation just to get things ready to go. So, what I would say is we can look for business owners who have taken that first step, they've started a business, they've established a clientele but I think if you go and talk to her over there, she doesn't really want to be in the strip center, right, she would rather be in a place that has character and those sorts of things.

If you look at a map, it's really kind of interesting and I never noticed it before but everything that is commercial kind of hugs to Washington Street or the Railroad tracks. This is all residential except for the area of Mary C Snow. If you look you have that whole, these are all commercial structures right through here, so that makes this very different than everything that is happening here and over here.

Are you talking about Florida Street?

Well it's really on one side of Florida Street.

And I'm glad you said that Dave, we talk so much about branding with these little micro districts on the West Side, it's not just about the branding, it's about the whole look. You're talking about the street fixtures, I mean that's something we really haven't talked a lot about is how you can identify these areas.

I think that one area you're talking about, if you think about what John said, if you identify it by local people who want to run businesses in their community and live there and work there, then that's \_\_\_\_\_. I mean I'm more invested because I live here and I think if you have a local person who is walking to work with ten people down there with a business, that's going to be key. When communities, on my street alone, we started this little, I think the mood on my street is we're kind of tired and we see things starting to take a major turn on our street on Edgewood Drive, I live a block from Stonewall, Orchard and Edgewood, and we're starting to see homeless people start living in our garages or living around our house or sitting in front of our house or being in our yard or people breaking in, people starting to steal things, we're seeing that crime starting to increase in our neighborhood which used to be very safe, very calm, we're starting to see. Our neighborhood, you've got to take things into your own hands kind of, with these business owners putting up that Martin Luther King mural to try to create some positive influence and asking neighbors will you donate this, will you give me a hundred bucks, and that little \$1,200 project, \_\_\_\_\_ accomplished that in hours.

In hours, so I think that people want to do things. But then you've got people like me who are getting a little bit tired. I want to see more happen quicker. When you start meeting people who want to do things and they start thinking about moving and getting less involved, you should be saying do more, be more involved.

I totally agree, I think that there are a ton of people that I talk to all the time that want to start businesses, they have these ideas, they have their business plan done, they want to start businesses on the West Side or East End. A lot of people are interested in the West Side right now obviously, but they don't have that extra capital upfront to renovate a building to get it where they can inhabit it and be successful right. So far as this plan is concerned, then the question becomes, you know maybe there's nothing in this plan that should address this, I don't know, but like what other potential incentives could folks offer to help white box these buildings, get them prepared for a business owner to come in, like you've done, like Bill Turner has done on the East End, among many others. What can be done to help get these buildings white boxed and shelled enough to bring an entrepreneur in that they don't have to make that initial investment, their rent may be a little bit higher to cover your investment, but what can be done to help that process along. I think that's a lot of the problem. Of course, jobs are always going to be an issue, but that's a statewide issue with jobs, job creation.

Developing is not easy and people have ideas that they can come and do it, but there are lots of regulations that they have to go through. So maybe CURA could do a 101 class on how to develop. Mark sat here earlier and talked about the 100-year floodplain, the one we're doing right now is in a 500-year floodplain and we didn't see that coming.

\_\_\_\_\_ the buildings would be a huge plus, more businesses active, is that more important, is the job creation fund what drives that or is the visual, having the buildings and lights on and people in them more important.

I think what we found happen in Elk City over the past two years, we had developers Dwayne and Andy, we had \_\_\_\_\_ that we're getting these properties to a certain level of improvement and that helped them recruit the businesses, it helped us recruit businesses that we wanted there right. It was more appealing to the business owner again to not have to make that extra investment because they had a product that was ready to move into and they could make their own capital investments with their equipment.

There's not a lot of that out there.

So I guess to answer your question, for so many years and this isn't a criticism, there was a lot of investment in tearing buildings down right, so I guess a sensible question could be asked, well instead of making that investment and tearing buildings down, could that same investment be made in helping

white box these properties, getting them to a point where a developer could or least help the developer to get it to that point.

So does that mean giving the developer more, I am a place of helping people, we're doing it again, we're doing it already, we're trying to put in a salon, we've got an office up and running, we've got an apartment that's going in and a guy who is starting a private garage, so we've got a few more little businesses there, they are tiny but there are going to be people there, and we're doing the same thing, we're doing what they need, but I'm not getting assistance from anybody other NBB, it's my money and I'm telling you I might be more apt to help if there were some other source of something, of a match somewhere. Dwayne and Andy if you're willing to put \$500,000 down here, I'll give you another \$500,000, because we believe that \_\_\_\_\_, if they are wanting if you'd be lucky \$750 for that property, I mean if somebody would match it, somebody would take it basically and say I'll run with it.

I'm not really big on CURA but certainly I think CURA probably has the most funding source for something like this. I would say that they have the flexibility to put whatever restrictions and requirements that they want on a request like that. How many jobs is it going to create, how many people are you going to employ for this, you know, whatever the possibilities are endless. I just think if we're talking about this plan and this particular area and this overlay area for this plan, does this give us an opportunity to say like okay buildings that exist in this plan that we identified that a high percentage of them are vacant right now, does that mean that maybe like CURA could actually come in and provide this extra programming to get these folks motivated to get them renovated, just a thought.

I mean it's one thing to throw additional money at something like that and that's probably a harder pull than maybe having, I talked about this earlier, a tax incentive. That money, they're not taxed on that.

Mark talked about the federal taxes but there's no way to guarantee that, I mean if we get it that would be fabulous but if we don't.

Correct me if I'm wrong Ron, but if you go in and put a couple hundred thousand dollars into a property, you're not taxed on those improvements for 10 years. Your property is not going to reappraise and you have to pay that additional tax.

It seems like on the City side, when you get into the state and federal that's a whole other thing, but how do you find the City, are there some things they can do to help whether it's tax incentives, not just writing you a check, but to help you develop. And goes back to zoning too, there are some things like that the city might not help.

Yeah, they could. We have a property right now that we keep lowering the price, I mean it's beautiful property, I could have rented it all day long to somebody but it's not safe for a rental and it's got \$50,000 worth of sprinkler system in it, it's got a two-story building and I have to desperately search for somebody to go in and put a business in it, and I think I've found somebody but we've had to dramatically reduce the rent.

Why is it not safe?

It's not safe for residential.

So, I'm all about what we can and what we can't, but that's international building codes, the City doesn't have the ability to budge on that. That's something we can't budge. There are a lot of things that I'll be the first to say let's tweak the bar wherever we can.

Maybe I don't know you probably have typical \_\_\_\_\_ zoning around here and maybe you get into more districting, something that gives you a little more flexibility.

One thing about the Washington Street Corridor, unless you put in sort of \_\_\_\_\_ district, the same as on the East End and I didn't get to jump in when you asked the question, what comes first jobs or filling the vacant spaces. We talked a lot about "oh we created 15 jobs and all that sort of stuff, and of

course, a big name manufacturer would be fantastic and the same way as in Nepal they don't measure GDP, they measure gross domestic happiness and I'm not \_\_\_\_, but I think that his idea with Project West Invest is you have created an idea of safety first and I agree with him and I think that's the feeling of businesses is, that's Goal No. 1, make people be there, make them feel safe there, and the other things the jobs kind of take care of themselves.

That's what this gentleman was saying about the grant, I think if you could get some of this money and let people start rehabbing their houses, that would help. I'm telling you, I do believe beauty helps, my friends laugh at me but I believe this to be true.

Well it's contagious.

Beauty comes and if one neighbor sees another one doing something, we all know that you landscape your yard and that 50% of people landscape their yard to impress their neighbor. That's why you're working on your yard, you're not doing it just to be doing it. I mean there's a study out that just said that. You know it's kind of keeping up with the Jones mentality, you're not out there to do it, I enjoy it and I'm wasting money actually but I just like it. I mean I think if you do things like that, I think it would help. I mean in an area like put in a park. It is on the uptick but you've got to get the money and like we wanted to redo our facade on West Washington but I'll be honest with you, we're tired of it. We went to \_\_\_\_ because we thought they match and found out that ours is not an adjoining building, you know, the Tattoo Barber Shop and there's no matching funds available now because that fell through so we're just not keen on spending \$30,000 more dollars to improve the aesthetic look of it which is not going to generate a dime more for us, so we're kind of well just let it sit there.

To both of your points, John and Dwayne, you know we can discuss what makes it better all day. I think that generally we know that getting property repaired makes it more appealing thus we'll get a business in there and will slowly change the culture of a particular district, that's what happened in Elk City right. But there are a lot of property owners in the City of Charleston, or at least in our districts that we work with, that I have deemed that they are waiting for Superman. They're waiting for this huge investment to come in that's going to raise the value of their property, then they'll be ready to invest in their property, then they'll be ready to start recruiting people to it and until then they're just going to let it sit there and I will say that Chin is one of those guys who thinks that his property in New China is worth way more than it is and he's just waiting on the perfect person to come along and allow them to invest in it and that will never happen, but there are a ton of people on the West Side who have that mentality, so then it becomes how do you deal with the private property owners who you can't control what they do with their building as long as they're up to code, so we could talk about incentives all day, but there's a certain culture and attitude that exists of these folks that believe it's coming, it's coming, it's coming and they've been saying that for 15 years now and it's not. They don't have the mentality of doing an Andy or Ty or Bill Turner, they created it themselves, so how do we change that culture and is that even addressable in this plan, I don't know, but I think it's at least worth.

This is one thing, several comments back, I think that Bob mentioned this in the report and I think what we found in doing this report is there are 3 different kinds of owners. Two major groups, you have small time landowners who by in large live a couple of blocks away or somewhere in town, they are local generally speaking and they have a couple or 3 or 4 properties that are maybe not very well taken care of, then you have the local folks who do take care of their stuff, they're just, maybe they have one or two rental units or something like that, they're small time, and then you have large owners who own a whole bunch of properties, some of which are good stewards of that and there are other folks who are not good stewards of that. One of things about building this report, it recommends and that I've been an advocate for, is we need some entity that can convince these people that they shouldn't own that property and you're not going to win over all those people right, but someone acting like a land bank are going to go to certain property owners and say listen there are some leans on your property, it's not worth anything, you're in water in value, so why don't you sign it over to use for tiddlywinks.

Along with that you could make them take care of their property.

Yes, it gives you some leverage.

Like we have a vacant lot on Main Street that I pay to have mowed every week or I mow it every week. I could let it grow 10 feet tall and I think somebody should fine them. You should absolutely send me a fine every week if I do not keep that lawn mowed.

Are there tactics that can be used within current city code that cities that have actual land banks that can be incorporated into a plan like this at least to generate ideas and spark innovation.

There would need to be, in Charleston's context, there would need to be some new entity, there are state code that enables land banking and so that would be like a URA but they have different \_\_\_\_\_.

Huntington has one, they are the only one in the state. But to Dwayne's point, there is a code enforcement issue going on which is you've got lots of properties that are well beyond the pale for code compliance and we only have so many hands that can write them up and there may be issues of taking care of the worst and not writing up the person for lawn grass because we've got a group over here that's falling into that. So, the other thing about incentives is you know the City adopted the big structure ordinance and that has moved the deal on the ability to place a cost on inactivity and letting properties just rot but it's probably not high enough realistically and there are enough loop holes that make property holders who are simply waiting for Superman, there's not a cost for waiting for Superman so they can keep on doing that.

That's a state law issue, I mean the teeth of those policies.

No, I think it was more of a political issue to get it adopted in the first go, it had to be measured, but I think that one of the recommendations that could be made is that needs to be re-evaluated, how is it working, how many people are engaged in the program, how many people we think aren't engaged in the program, what are the loop holes, you know is that \_\_\_\_\_. One of the things that that building reports found is there is a major difference of what meets the \_\_\_\_ definition of a vacant structure and actually ends up on the list and has a cost associated with it, an annual fee, and what is functionally a vacant structure in the neighborhood. If you have a for sale sign in the window, and so that's a problem. But to the neighbors, it's still a broken-down building that has folks breaking into it.

Just out of curiosity John, from a Planning Office standpoint, and I'm sure there as some processes in place, but is there not a time table that could be set on someone who puts their house on the market, abandons their house, leaves their house vacant. Is there a time table that can be set on that, that can be set for a 60-day period?

Right now, it's set at a year and that's probably too long and so I don't know how you do this in a way that doesn't harm people, we don't want to create harm to people that are trying to do their best.

Sure.

It's an issue that needs to be studied.

Other things you mentioned, this lighting issue, safety issue, with more people living in the neighborhood benefit you?

I think in areas if you don't take care of, and this is true anywhere, but I think until you really start looking at writing, start working with, but we are getting this influx of people we really are, people that are just kind of squatting. When you live in an area where you never had an issue and now it's becoming a bigger issue, it's growing. I don't know if that's increased patrol, I mean I don't know if the state, the City, getting to patrol it a little more.

Patrol cannot do anything to anybody, like if they are on your property, you have to have a sign that says no loitering or trespassing before they can even issue them a citation.

Having said that, there are ways of discouraging that kind of behavior, the lighting, there are cameras and those are things that are important enough that needs to be changed, does that become a deterrent.

There needs to be more people on the street and businesses that have evening hours and then there are people on the street and there's more activity on the street and that deters the, and just like Elk City now, you've got businesses, everybody started shutting up shop, the Grille at 4 o'clock, Hobby Center went from 8 or 9 at night to 7 and then it went to 5:30 and then 5. And so, you weren't having any activity, those are places that would bring a lot of activity on the streets, now the Grille has reopened and starting, in the Elk City area, staying open later. So, to me it's businesses that stay open later and put people or recreation or whatever that bring people into the area.

You mentioned earlier the tax situation, I was getting ready to move \_\_\_\_\_ from that old building to the West Side. I have a building in South Charleston that I was looking at and I went to Charleston to the City and talked to them about are there any incentives, B&O tax for two years, you know, is there anything you can do to help me get into this new building and I was getting ready to spend a lot of money to get the building ready and I was getting ready to spend a million bucks and I could have went to South Charleston and gotten some incentives. So, Charleston won't offer them but South Charleston will and that's why you go down to South Charleston you'll see a different, there aren't a lot of empty buildings and when they are they fill back up because they're offering incentives. So, the City could step in and help them, I wasn't acting for a gold mine, I was just asking for any help that they would offer and I didn't get anything.

Well most cities this size will do that, it seems like we're a little behind.

I'm telling you, I am not slamming the City, but I'm telling you this as a true story, they will not walk paperwork from this office to this office across the hallway. I am telling you they will not do it, they are that, you have to take it over there, I mean this is ridiculous.

I was going to say we have a new administration coming soon and I think it will be, I don't know, but not \_\_\_\_\_, as the person who was across the hall finds it as frustrating as well.

I can tell you real quickly, I was in Huntington and we're helping mentor Huntington's program Main Street which started in West Huntington and that was Mayor Williams and he went over and detailed the new program they started a couple of years ago. They actually created a position for a Business Liaison and that person's whole job is to coordinate all of the departments, all the paperwork associated with any of the businesses started, all the departments, create a packet and give it to the business owner then the business owner goes back to the liaison distributes to all the departments. So, the business owner talks to one person and it has been extremely helpful for businesses, and that's a simple fix.

In a city that doesn't have that point-of-contact, Lori, Dan, and I kind of play those people and that's not what we do.

Right.

We think we know what the collector's office is going to do, but then they won't, so yes, a single person would be a huge asset.

I have a lot of houses and apartment buildings on the West Side and the City recommended, you know, they had meetings with landlords and property owners and they implemented this thing where every 2 years the property is inspected by City Inspectors for code things, but it's only on rental property and not on residential, not on private owned, and every landlord in Charleston said this will not work. You already have all the laws in place, enforce what is in place but they did not do that. So anyway, they implemented this new strategy, new law, against the chagrin of all the landlords and what they did on two of my properties, I've got two different buildings, they came in and they were going to require new heating system, there was nothing wrong with the buildings, they were sturdy, sound, middle class rentals, you know, people needed them and I paid utilities in one building and had all utilities and

would rent the apartments. Long story short, they wouldn't pass these new strenuous codes which there are international codes and the city enforced it. So, I emptied out the buildings, two buildings emptied out, and was going to come in and revamp them which was going to cost me \$50,000 - \$70,000 to put air conditioning in them.

Is that separate systems.

Separate systems, and it's real expensive when you start doing that kind of thing. It was going to cost more than what the building was worth. So, what happened, the hobos and homeless broke in, stole copper, tore out the kitchen, tore out the bathrooms. In the matter of 2-3 months just destroyed these apartments, so then instead of \$40,000 remodeling you've got a \$75,000-\$80,000 remodel and the power company terminated the electric and it's a domino thing that just makes you crazy and we called, and then you lose those residents, there were 8 units, and they were 2 people in each, so 16 people and they go to South Charleston or wherever, and over and over again I can tell you and 50 landlords can tell you that the population dropped and we said this is going to happen and all of the sudden you have boarded up buildings that have to be torn down and then they come through with this new thing, if you don't do it, they will fine you \$2,500 a year because the buildings are boarded up and the reason it was boarded up was because of a loss. I mean you're on the other side of the fence and I understand.

Well, no I have a lot of sympathy to where you're coming from, because it's an international building code, I don't know if we have any way of.

I think we're talking about different things, I mean if you're \_\_\_\_\_ to your inspection that, is that \_\_\_\_\_ or who does those inspections.

No, that was the \_\_\_\_\_ registration ordinance that the City \_\_\_\_\_.

I'm in no way casting aspersions upon you or anything like that, but those code violations existed right, they were violations before the ordinance right, so if an inspector happened to be in there, they would have written the same citation. So, it's not that the \_\_\_\_\_ Registration Ordinance did was, so we discovered all of these things, and we were talking about this the other day. We had this stagnation of investment of at least 25 years, you know, in most other cities where there is any sort of growth pressure, building owners made those updates and there's a cost of reinvestment in buildings and we've kind of been running on fumes for 20 years now.

From the commercial side, the way to speak to this is, when you rehab a property, because once it's done commercially you're good, you have a certificate and nobody is coming back and reinspecting, so we start working for \_\_\_\_\_, and he said wait they're doing this right next door. Well that doesn't mean you can do it because you're in the process of renovating and now you have to bring it up to code. So, people think they're going to be able to do something because they see it, but just because somebody else is doing it now, doesn't mean if they were renovating, they now would be required to bring it to standard.

I'm not taking these rules personally, I was trying to add the context of why that probably happened.

We had a guy, like Dwayne said he's got a home on Edgewood and it's a rental home, the inspector comes in and he does \$30,000 worth of renovation to get it to qualify. The house on either side of him can be falling down, porches falling off, weeds 3 feet high, and nobody from the city will do anything about those two houses.

I mean that's a disproportionate issue.

They're a dilapidated mess and you'll look it, and this happened to me, and two houses down I have a guy, and somebody from the city drove by, knows it's a rental, and I get this letter, we're going to do an inspection. If you don't repair your gutter and do this, this, and this we're going to condemn, or going to do something to your property, uninhabitable or I was like, are you kidding, look up the street, this

mess that I have to look at. I'm spending \$500,000 and the neighbor that owns this house and I have to look at this mess across the street and now I've got to go spend \$2,000 to do this and that's a true story.

It's a code issue that I think, I don't know if you agree with this Bob, but significant numbers of people are living in really probably unsafe and unhealthy conditions and that's okay because they own the home. So, either certain living conditions are a threat to health and safety and need to be addressed and there not, and it doesn't need to disproportionately fall on landlords or business owners. If these are health and safety issues, then these are health and safety issues.

We've got an economically depressed area and the owner is 80 years old with no income, well I would like to agree with you, but a lot of work has been done in low communities and we developed a slogan, poor people have poor ways and that means that people are doing the best they can with what they have and just because something seems to be a safety issue and necessarily should be corrected, you know, if they don't have the money to do it, then they've just got to figure it out whatever they can figure it out, just pray that nothing really happens so I mean. That's why I keep stressing on this thing that CURA did 2 weeks ago on trying to figure out how to get that money on the street as soon as possible. Because there are people who are living in conditions on the West Side area, especially with plumbing and electrical issues, roof issues and all that kind of stuff, that this money that you allocated could start to be spent tomorrow and aid these people in getting through the winter with all the stuff you're talking about doing and I can name you 10 people that would fill out an application and take it to you by the end of the day, maybe more than them. There's probably enough that the money that you allocated could be spent or committed probably by the end of the month.

Obviously, people know about the money.

Well let's not get the detail, we don't know the details yet. Two weeks ago, we approved the concept of helping people to improve their homes if they are owner occupied or a second group to help them buy houses on the West Side and we'll put together all the details. I am frustrated that it's too slow but we're working on that.

Well, you know, if you've been working on something for 10 years, any kind of delay means that it is slow because you're 10 years behind the clock and I mean you cannot ring the bell or anything like that but you can move forward with some urgency and we're not seeing that and we're bearing the brunt of what has happened and we have no answers for the people who keep bringing up the questions.

\_\_\_\_the home program taking applications.

Yes, so the home program is active right now, they're getting probably record-breaking response. There has been better outreach this year, so yeah, those programs do exist and there is assistance.

Yeah, but the programs they have so much red tape to them, you know, that the average person can't get through it, there's no way.

I'm not just saying this because I'm a bureaucrat by profession and training but the red tape is usually there for a reason and I want to cut through it as much as the next person.

There's a way to get through it, you know, when we first started doing this, we worked with WV Housing and they cut all the red tape so that we were even doing long closings for people to expedite the process.

I think the trick to cutting the red tape is not necessarily saying we're done with the tape, is having the people in position who know how to advocate the stuff on behalf of people who don't, that's the assistance the city really needs to be doing.

Like an expeditor?

Yeah, someone like a business coordinator or a housing person.

Well we were able to get on all that stuff, even the stuff Mark was talking about, with the floodplain situation, with lots being 25 feet and the whole 9 years that he was talking about that was so difficult and you know I'm just a 15-year communication worker and a business electrician, doing whatever handyman and we figured it out and we got it done but we didn't get any help believe me. Because we got money for sticks and bricks and nothing else and it's hard to do development with sticks and bricks money, but I mean you know, I guess if you work on something for so long you start to get frustrated and it doesn't matter who sits in the chair that should be knocking on your door seeing what you need to help you do what you're trying to do. You know, it's just that the seed is there and the work is not getting done. You know, I hate to keep on about it, but the urgency to see some of this stuff done has never been there as far as we look at the West Side neighborhood and especially as it relates to the West Side neighborhood home ownership zone. Why would an organization name an area a home ownership zone and then do practically nothing to expedite this area becoming a model community, so to speak, which is also one of the mantras that we use in what we're trying to do. We want to create a model community that can be replicated anywhere. I mean this is how you do it, you put it together like that and it's not easy, because telling poor people or low welfare people that they can buy a house. I mean it sounds like a pipe dream, but when you start putting stuff together like Home Lend and grant funds and stuff like that, then it starts to become possible because when you build \$70,000-\$80,000 houses and the people only qualify for a \$25,000-\$30,000 loan, you know, it's going to take some creative financing to put that together. But we were able to do it, so nobody can tell me that it's not doable because we did it and we could still do it but we need more help as time has gone on, and things have changed, and population has dwindled, and the administration has changed, different people sitting in the seats, and their focus becomes something else, someplace else, so what you're doing and where you're doing it, doesn't ring a bell in their head, so the area suffers greatly from disinvestment and then investment happens all around them and an example of the West Side community, if you look at it with the new school, with Hospice, with Mountain Mission, what they did and other things, you know, somewhere in the neighborhood of \$200 million was spent but the neighborhood was allowed to fall in to the point that \$500,000 was spent to tear down all the houses or a bunch of houses and not create any businesses or any jobs. So where is the foresight in that, I mean you do all this stuff but then the center of the community falls apart, so if you put all this stuff around it and don't do anything about the heart then the body is going to die.

But when you look at what you're saying, what I hear, the challenge is those public investments made in things like schools improve property values and draw people to the neighborhood, that's the goal. The flipside of that is you're looking to put public money into private structures and that's why they need time to figure out how to come up with a strategy to make that happen, because it has to be done in a way that passes the mustard of using public money for somebody's private financial gain, it's not an easy thing to do.

Yeah. That's true.

I mean subsidy funds come from different places and different locations, I mean at the time when we started the home program, we did well as long as it was controlled by WV Housing Development Fund. Once they started \_\_\_\_\_ out what they called Consumer \_\_\_\_\_, then the people having the money at the county and city level didn't have the level of expertise that the people at WV Housing had to be able to get the money out to the cities and to the counties to keep this thing moving. So, it basically fell apart because of a lack of interest by the people who were handling the money.

So, when those programs were in place and working, what improvements were you seeing. What did they do to move the needle in the neighborhood?

We built new houses and rehabbed old houses and did job training and put people to work.

So that happened over the period of time from when.

From 1994 when we first started up until about 2001 when it became almost impossible and basically it ended around 2005.

This is what you were telling me about during the break.

Exactly.

It's tricky when you start to, I talked about the public realm and when you cross that line, that's one thing to put money towards public home improvements and that needs to be discussed but how do you cross over into private property.

Right, and then it becomes well how do you incentivize that to happen, because if you incentivize it with public funds that I think.

Well that's one of the strategies.

Well more clear than just moving public funds over to private property, that makes it a lot more challenging.

That's not the end-all but that's certainly one way to make it more attractive for people to improve their properties.

And there are programs that do that.

Because that equates to real money, you know.

But it is a very structured manner in which that happens.

Like we mostly talked about, business development, like we want to leverage private funding.

Exactly and what he's getting at is the people that we're trying to engage with here are, they don't have matching funds, if they had the funds to do it themselves they would, and that's the trouble here, so I think that we need to, obviously this is something that CURA can just lift or the City can just lift, home land funds, and HUD funds are just not going to do this. The dollars and cents just don't add up, so what other funding could you leverage to incentivize people to do it, I don't know.

I don't even know, I think you and I have had this discussion, if it is even in your charter, if you're even allowed to do this, right.

But who is paying the paycheck, who pays the paychecks, you know that's the thing, there's money that comes out there.

Well there are programs, just like Mark was saying, the administration people in this area, in local government, city government, state government, they are not out there looking for the grants that they need to get to be able to do stuff. I mean Charleston Housing they had to go to Chicago and bring a developer in who could do the tax credits so that they could redo all the public housing in the City of Charleston. I mean nobody in the City or the state could they go to and get that kind of expertise or they weren't actually trying to find anybody or nobody is looking at well this is a great potential project. Why isn't somebody local trying to do that, I mean you know, it's just that the unintended consequences of people just occupying a seat and not doing what they are supposed to do, you know leaves people lacking when government services are available. So, if we could do it working with WV Housing, why couldn't we do it working with the City of Charleston.

So, there's a couple of things I would like to flush out that Bob just said and that's I think there are 2 capacity issues, one of which I think Mark hit on, right. There are not, we don't have a whole cadre of people who are really savvy at development, that know how to get the funding sources in the same way that the developer was able to help you guys. So I think building capacity in that regard is really important, but what really came out of the buildings report to me is we also have a capacity issue with the folks having the skills, abilities, and knowledge to either be a savvy renter, right because you can be a bad renter and cause your landlord a whole bunch of headaches and cause yourself a whole bunch of headaches through not knowing how to be a good renter, and you can be a very bad homeowner and make poor decisions or not reach out to the folks that might be able to provide you assistance to make

sure that your own investment in your home is going to stay safe and so to me capacity building and education are really essential.

Just one comment Bob, what that developer did from Chicago for us, was put up his personal bank account to back everything we did, to national \_\_\_\_ funds to \_\_\_\_\_ the property. We don't have anyone local with that deep pockets.

You're trying to tell me that nobody in West Virginia has as much money as.

I'm telling you he was the one.

He's saying that we might have, but he was the person willing to do it.

Prior to when I got there, there wasn't any cooperation from local folks to make anything happen. But I can tell you that the folks at the city backed us, partnered with us, to get this done. It wasn't out of Chicago, a lot of local folks made this happen.

Well I mean you're to be commended for just the effort to find somebody, I mean you found somebody who could help get the project done and that's what I'm saying, that the people who sit in some of the chairs and we're talking about, they aren't doing that.

Let me say, what we did, and we came through a lot of struggles and you need someone to help guide you through the process, but you know we're getting ready to do our 10th deal and you all think well you've done one and they're all the same but they are not. Depending on what funding sources come to the table and if we need City people they come and try to help us. Often times they have to go through it just like we do and are still doing it. But it takes multiple people to make it happen.

So, we're hearing that, that comes up a lot, the urgency thing has been a repetitive thing and certainly it seems like it's a little bit discombobulated as far as just people, even if they want to do something, it's a difficult process to figure out the process, and so maybe that needs to be addressed a little closer in this update.

\_\_\_\_Park, and the historic district, that's great, but it also comes to cost, especially depending on what kind of money you put into it and that starts more with SHPO, they talk about, you know, once you turn something in they don't respond for 30 days. Folks who are doing the field work will have it done in a week, it sets on that lady's desk until the 30th day before she has any interest in it.

I have some knowledge on how some of these programs work but, understanding is part of the challenge for many of these home owners is lack of resources, right, they don't have the resources. Is there a program such as the home loan, does everybody know how that program works? In case somebody doesn't, if somebody goes to buy a house, so much of that is going to come from public funds, if they live in the house for a certain amount of time, so is there a similar program that exists for somebody that is a homeowner that wants to stay in that house, it needs to be improved, they don't have the resources.

There's another program that does that.

So, it allows you to make improvements and a certain amount is forgiven if they stay in it for a certain amount of time?

Yeah.

So, then that says to me and I'm wondering about this the whole time during the \_\_\_\_ building meeting on, is all of these programs are dependent upon the residents being motivated enough to want to participate and because it's private property, no matter what we put in place, if they don't want to participate we can't do anything.

I think what I hear often times, they own it out right, and don't want any liens on it.

But if they're not willing to take that step, I mean it's private property.

There is a subjective element to it and that's the problem.

But if we can show them why they ought to do that.

Because there will always be some people that won't, but we could at least improve the chances that they'll take advantage.

Then it becomes like you say, is it an educational thing, is it, so there are programs out there that are being underutilized.

I think people do get frustrated with the City, but there's not one central place you go to get guidance through the whole process.

So, if we're talking about that from the business side, maybe we also need an advocate on the residential side.

On the residential side they have home buyer counseling and at the time we were starting, WV Housing Development Fund, they spent millions of dollars maybe getting people trained to do home buyer counseling and the whole nine years associated with housing. I mean I probably went to there enough that they thought I was a resident, just to learn how to do this and I mean it took us just sitting down with people almost one-on-one because we had held our classes weekly and the requirements that we had for a person to qualify is that they had to go through so many hours of home buyer counselor and that's not teaching them the mortgage process, that's teaching them like, look if you want to live here, you're got to pay and if you don't pay you are not going to get to live here and you know you are trying to train people to understand they have a responsibility. They're only going to go through that home buying process maybe one time, maybe twice, so you know all the procedures that you go through to teach them what the banking situation and all, to me that's unnecessary but the things that you have to go over with people is look we are going to help you buy this house, but it's going to be your responsibility to take care of it and the first thing you've got to take care of is making the payments and we've gotten them to as well as we can possibly get them based on what their income is at this point and if you go out and get some better training and get a better job, that's to your advantage but we are not going to take the house away from you because that happens, but we have to go over with people, look make your house payments or else. People pay their utility bills before they pay their rent. I mean can you imagine that. I mean look, when you go to collect the rent, well I had to pay my electric bill. You know what I tell them, you've got the electric pole right there and you can move right next to it but you're not staying in here. I mean, but that's a hard line but people need to understand certain things and before you can turn this process over to them, you've got to put them through it and then one of the things that we learned through our experience is that if a person is renting a piece of property and have lived in it for years, 2 years whatever, and they have consistently made those rent payments, why in the world would you think that if you helped them buy a house that they wouldn't make those house payments. It happened with us, the people that we helped buy a house, they are still living in them and almost have them paid for and you know the process ended when we ended, well we're not ended but.

I've got a question if you don't mind, Ron and I made these calls to get this certain kind of constituency of folks together for this meeting, I wanted to make sure because I don't want to waste anybody's time, but I'm just really conscious of not wasting anybody's time as busy as we all are. So, I wanted to make sure that you all are getting the information you need for the input of this plan as it relates to the business development/commercial property section.

Yeah, because I want to go back to that.

I want to make sure just as a person who help coordinate this to keep it on that.

No, I appreciate that.

We're probably getting towards the end of the time, is there anything we missed, commercial property owners, anything else we need to address.

These are all good things.

One thing, like Rick said, not white box, I do think that's important on the West Side, because I see these little consignment shops go in and like that little Cousins restaurant that came in. They go in but don't have any marketing skills, they paint a wall, and it just isn't drawing the traffic that it needs to have. Now we are talking business district and so to me the plan that the developer went in, like what happened in Elk City, is a big key to that on the West Side. Because then it draws people, business owners who already know what they're doing, and then that opens up the gate for these other little small businesses that maybe don't have the experience like Frank and Julia and maybe it opens up the gate for that little Cousins to survive or the little consignment shop to survive, when you bring in a couple of the bigger people.

Right.

And because a walk just isn't going to bring me down to that restaurant, it's not going to happen, but to get traffic down that way, it's like Gresham Plumbing, you know that name, they can move and you're still going to drive there, I just think that's real important, that plan is, that is really thought about when you're developing.

So, along the lines of what you're talking about Cathy, one thing I had written down to ask is do you foresee any section of this part of the plan that could make recommendations or address public policy issues that would help incentivize these, I'm not talking about municipal code, is there anything that we lobby for at the state level. As we all know, most state law and code is built around rural communities, they never really, I've never seen them spend a whole lot of time addressing the issues that exist in communities in WV, in this state.

Right.

So, like is there anything, we talked about, are there opportunities for groups like us to advocate for special incentives, either tax incentives, or whatever can be done at the state level for developers who are going to develop toward professionals, of course, there is a whole slew of like age discrimination stuff you've got to worry about there. That's just one easy example to get it into urban areas more. There's just not a lot of legislation at the state level that really focuses on the issues that we face as an urban community, obviously the city has a lot of bills that have been written here recently, but I guess my question for the plan is should we be focusing on public policy issues from a municipal and state level recommendations that could be made to help move these things along that we talked about today.

The answer is absolutely, yes. That will be part of this, because this has come up over and over again. We had already planned on researching that and addressing it, because.

Do you feel like the feedback you've gotten so far directly from business owners and developers will help shape some of those?

It's been great, even the group of four, and like I said you've kind of kicked you all off and it's been pretty, you know, very helpful. I know we are running out of time but I would like to keep going around while we still have you all. Thank you all for your time too and there will be more opportunities as this thing goes over the next 4-5 months to interact with you again, but is there anything else, just want to, maybe some leaving remarks or closing thoughts that we haven't hit on.

This is commercial and residential, do you talk to a lot of people on the West Side, on the lower West Side, those two don't look anything alike, and even to the businesses, the community does just not want to come to this area because the perception is that it is not safe.

Right. That came up in the earlier session too.

I think we all do a poor job. Everybody will harp on what's wrong as opposed to saying what's right. Even at the meeting 10-15 years ago, if you take a look at what it looked like then to what it looks like now, it has come a long way and rather than elevate our \_\_\_\_ we just.

It's easy to not do that and there has been some.

Well that's the point, there could a strategy that talks about, we wrote an editorial and it's positive, I don't know, but to think about how do you change that perception.

And even working with realtors they won't offer to show the houses.

Bring them out to coffee and if they find out, just to engage them, all the sudden the world changes. It's an excellent point.

How about some advertising, you know, the year before I bought the Gresham Plumbing Supply Company, they spent \$106 on advertising and this year I'll spend close to \$20,000. I've been doing TV commercials and sponsor this and that and newspaper stuff, radio stuff, different things.

I like those commercials by the way.

And it's very expensive, and I'm doing all kinds of things, what is my emphasize is that we have moved to a new location, with radio ads, I didn't put it up, it's taste of the art and I don't understand it, but at any rate reinforcement that it's a good place to be. They are putting some ads on here over the next couple of weeks about Charleston and like I go over there and say this is my Charleston, couple of little ads, but it's very positive. But if you guys could somehow get involved in helping a little big with the advertising for all the businesses, for different people, for Bob's organization, to make it all positive, everything has to be positive, nothing negative. Because all you hear is negative, but just positive and that gets the mindset starting to change. I'm getting a lot of women driving Mercedes and BMWs pulling into Gresham's that I didn't get at the old store because it's clean, nice lights, big windows, flowers out front.

Well you've got the big parking lot.

Yeah, big parking lot, so we just need to reinforce to people that it's a good place and the sidewalks and streets have to be kept clean and the people walking up and down the street with their pants hanging down or no shirts on, I don't know what you do, I put free Wi-Fi in my buildings, I've got Wi-Fi for the company and I've got a Wi-Fi for the customer and I didn't put a passcode on it, you just come in and you get it. Well I started looking at my cameras one day and there were people at the fence and I was like what's that, so I asked a fellow and he said oh, people heard you have Wi-Fi, so after we close in the evening they are lining up on the fence out front and setting out there and drinking their cokes, beer, whatever and you know, because they are using the Wi-Fi. So, it forced me to put a security code on my Wi-Fi.

Electric outlets are also a big thing, they charge the.

Like is somebody did a collective advertising in the paper would you participate. You know, if Rick went out and got 10 businesses to all put in a grand and did gang advertising with a positive spin, would you participate.

Yeah, do it and match it. You give me a thousand and I'll give you a thousand.

Okay.

That's kind of what he was talking about a while ago about the building.

I'm not even sure match it because public funds for advertising is fuzzy, but just putting the ad together to control the positive spin on the ad could make it.

We've done it before for different publications.

Yeah, the West Side did it a long time too, just like an event is coming to town and they would do like a page ad and they would feature six businesses that were all sort of clustered together and then we would administer the whole thing, design it, and they would all just pay into it. Those are effective.

That's to target, I'm thinking a little more like a billboard.

Oh sure, it's more of a campaign, no I totally agree and on that same note I think, I wonder and I don't know if this is in the plan or not, I'm trying to keep it to the plan but I almost wonder if there is room for a best practices/feature of the businesses in this particular district that we're talking about that have reinvested like Gresham has, the Smoke House, Gresham's, the Charleston Department Stores, the Youngs, that whole group that maybe even provides like a best practices, show case them in a way like this is what you can be if you invest this way or something like that.

Like an open house thing.

I don't know if works in the plan or not but I think we have enough institutional businesses on the West Side that have shown that you can be successful as a business owner over here to somehow showcase that in the plan.

As an example,

Like as an example of some sort, I almost wonder if that would be a motivator of some sort, that would at least show we as the group who is putting this plan together are contentious to the fact that that's what makes it.

We're neighbors and it's a neighborhood. As a neighborhood we depend on each other, we help each other, you know, you help me, I help you.

And I don't know if that's in the plan or not.

We look at areas where we focus on long-term business perspective and this plan talks about a few areas, I always felt that the bar on Washington Street, just in terms of the physical layout, we talked about the topography, it creates a real challenge because, you know, \_\_\_\_ wouldn't be expensive if they didn't have that side parking lot. The fact that the majority of traffic going that way passes those businesses while they are leaving town at the end of the day, have to make a left turn if somebody has a lot, and if not, they've got to get behind their buildings to come into those. It almost makes it impossible for a business to succeed there.

Well all those businesses use the alley way as their main door.

So, is that an area we should focus on, look at, if you had some, a few flat public parking areas that came in at a grade off of Washington for people to access those businesses, or do you look at a streetscape on the backside of those buildings, so you don't feel like you're parking in an alley to go into a business, because they are just impossible to get to.

Well those streets we got, right there at the corner of \_\_\_\_ and Washington, CURA tore all those old buildings down.

That's the hillside lot right, no I know where you're talking about now.

That would be a great location for a new business, with parking in the front, not behind. That's a perfect opportunity for those two blocks to build the building on back of the lot.

Well I think maybe the real opportunity is you keep the businesses to the front, but throughout that stretch of 3 blocks there, you have 2 or 3 neighborhood lots where anybody could service any business and pull in then access that walk, well \_\_\_\_\_, well signs.

It's a good point, really what you see if you go to other cities and town and you're in these neighborhood business districts, there is only a designated parking lot that services 7-10 building businesses.

That's what we were saying and you walk maybe a block or two to get to the building because it's marked.

It's just hard to get to anywhere.

Yeah, if you had a central place, that's a great point.

I personally as a business owner don't think walking in the back of buildings is ever a good idea, because people don't see the back of the building and the whole West Side Main is like that, but you know out where Kohl's is at on Corridor G, I was at the municipal meeting when they improved that and the City wanted them to build on the front on Corridor G and have the parking on the rear and that guy was going to spend a lot of money and he said that will not work, they've done many studies on it and you can't park behind a building and get customers to come in, he said you have to have it in front and they approved it and put the parking in front and you've seen the success out there.

I hate one-way streets. That's one place because of the topography where I always thought if it was one way headed that direction and you treated it like you do in Charleston, where you have angled parking in the front of all those businesses.

The problem you have with walkable it might be more effective than that narrow two-way with a wall right here and you're sitting on the sidewalk of the business and it's just a very hard place to navigate. It's just something to think about it might be an area we could focus on and that might help drive what we've seen here on this side of Washington, with that other side if we really have, what would it look like if it was ideal.

Well we find just to that point, that Kohl's model doesn't work because people want to park, get out of their car, go in and leave and like downtown in an urban condition, we like to pull buildings up closer to the public realm because it can actually feel uncomfortable if you're walking, especially at night, if you're walking down a sidewalk and you have a large expanse of asphalt between you and the properties and it looks nice to have the buildings\_\_\_\_\_.

An example to use there, on Capital Street, the first building past Diamond Building, that strip, just a blank space.

Capital Street is a textbook example of a great street and then you're right, if you go one block on Capital Street, it gets weird and we call it a snaggle tooth, you get these holes in the fabric then you get these large expanses.

People are afraid to go back there.

Yeah, it' gets strange, so a little different.

Thank you all very much.