



THRESHOLD
Lexington's Housing Commission
Wednesday, March 22, 2023 - 4:00 P.M
Second Floor Conference Room, City Hall
300 E. Washington Street, Lexington, VA

AGENDA

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Approval of Agenda**
- 3. Approval of Minutes**
 - A. Approval of February 22, 2023 minutes*
- 4. New Business**
 - A. Conversation with Lynne Johnson and Steve Neas of Habitat for Humanity and a representative from Mission Next Door
 - B. Review and editing of underutilized property survey letter
- 5. Adjournment**

*indicates attachment

MINUTES

THRESHOLD

**Lexington's Housing Commission
Wednesday, February 22, 2023 – 4:00 p.m.
Second Floor Conference Room, City Hall**

Threshold:

Present: Shadrey Sands, Chair
Fred Kirchner, Vice-Chair
Marisa Charley
Marylin Alexander, Council Liaison
Nicholas Betts, Council Liaison

City Staff:

Arne Glaeser, Planning Director
Kate Beard, Administrative Assistant

Absent: Nadine Craney

CALL TO ORDER:

S. Sands requested clarification of procedure with respect to quorum and whether attendance by Council Liaisons counted toward the four member requirement. Director Glaeser answered that the by-laws were not explicit on that point but specify that the Liaison is a voting member, and as such, recent practice has been to have a Liaison count toward quorum. S. Sands called the meeting to order at 4:04 pm.

AGENDA

The agenda was unanimously approved as presented. (S. Sands / N. Betts)

MINUTES:

The minutes from the January 25, 2023 were unanimously approved as presented. (M. Charley / M. Alexander).

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Discussion of Lynchburg's vacant property registry and Lexington's vacant property map –

Director Glaeser reported there is little language associated with Lynchburg's registry aside from the requirement that the owner or manager of a vacant, derelict property register the property with the City and pay a \$100.00 registration fee on an annual basis. He said that though there is no explanation for the registry, his presumption was that it is intended to give the City a means to contact a responsible party should there ever be a problem with one of the properties. He added that Lynchburg sends out a reminder notice a month before the annual registration date and that there is a \$200.00 civil penalty for failure to register. He noted the Lynchburg Code references the State's definitions for *vacant*, *dilapidated*, and *blighted* properties.

There was discussion about how such a registry might be useful in Lexington and whether or not a registration fee should be included. M. Alexander noted that not all vacant property

is developable. F. Kirchner made the observation that historically Threshold has been most effective at neighborhood clean-up and rehabilitation rather than development. The discussion then focused on vacant/dilapidated structures in the City, enforcement of the Maintenance Code, and the existence of properties with tax delinquencies and unknown ownership.

S. Sands asked the Commission to consider what the goal would be for a vacant property registry in Lexington and suggested that perhaps the goal should be to encourage the development or better use of underutilized parcels. N. Betts expressed support for instituting a registry for vacant/derelict structures, similar to Lynchburg's, with an associated fee. He noted that a number of nearby localities have similar programs to discourage derelict, vacant or underutilized properties and argued such a program could have the effect of opening up additional properties to increase housing in Lexington. Several Threshold Commissioners stated they were reluctant to levy any additional fee or fine on property that is already taxed.

M. Alexander suggested that a letter be drafted to the owners of properties with vacant/derelict structures. She suggested the letter could include statistical data from the housing study detailing housing needs in the City and encourage property owners to rehabilitate existing houses to make them livable. She added that if Threshold is given a line item in the budget, the letter could also include an offer for financial assistance to rehab the structure contingent upon a commitment from the owner to rent the rehabbed home to low to moderate income households for a specified number of years. M. Alexander's suggestion was met with enthusiasm.

A. Glaeser said staff could draft an investigative letter for Threshold to review and wordsmith at its next meeting. He suggested the letter could be investigative, in advance of the housing study, and ask for feedback from property owners about their plans for their properties. He cautioned that details for a proposed program to fund rehabilitation projects would need to be far more fleshed out and funded by Council. Following discussion of the procedural issues for beginning a new Threshold program, A. Glaeser indicated that the current Planning & Development Department staff would likely have sufficient manpower to coordinate a small number of renovations per year, should Council provide funding. There was general agreement to proceed with the survey/letter and various Threshold members provided suggestions for how to structure the first draft. A. Glaeser pledged to provide a draft letter prior to the next meeting and requested that Threshold members forward him addresses of properties that appear to be dilapidated or vacant. He said he would then confirm whether they ought to be included in the mailing list. There was agreement that responses to the letter could help to inform the structure of a potential future Threshold program.

B. Report on United Way partnership in Western Crawford County, Pennsylvania -

M. Charley shared a summary of the Community Improvement Center (CIC), a partnership between the United Way, a local college, and the County and City governments in Crawford County, Pennsylvania. She explained that the CIC is its own entity under the United Way umbrella, has its own Board, and serves as the organizational hub for community improvement by vetting project requests and coordinating their completion using an identified group of retired or acting contractors and tradesmen volunteers. The CIC does not have a very large operating budget, relying mostly on donated materials and labor, but does some fundraising for offsetting costs. She remarked that the program has been wildly effective in its community, which is a much higher need area than Lexington. She indicated that if a similar program were adopted here, she envisioned it could serve to put needy residents in touch with

Habitat or Mission Next Door and coordinate services to those individuals who do not qualify for those programs.

F. Kirchner asked about the size of the community served by the CIC, pointing out that it may have a greater number of tradesmen willing to donate time. M. Charley acknowledged that could be the case but countered that Lexington had far fewer properties in need of this type of attention. M. Alexander said it sounded similar to what Threshold was doing prior to the pandemic but on a larger scale. F. Kirchner remarked Threshold's best efforts historically involved groups of volunteer college students. S. Sands offered that in his position at RARA he has been overwhelmed by the number of student groups that have reached out to offer volunteer services and suggested Threshold could use student volunteers as a resource for its efforts including non-construction related property maintenance projects. Addressing potential construction related projects, he brought up liability concerns. F. Kirchner pointed out that Habitat has a well working model for volunteer construction projects and cautioned against Threshold getting in to the realm of acting as a developer.

A. Glaeser suggested inviting representatives from Habitat and Mission Next Door to the next meeting to share their experiences in Lexington and to discuss how Threshold might aid or advance their efforts. There was general agreement that such a conversation would be helpful. A. Glaeser said he would extend invitations.

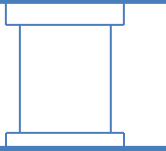
Responding a request from S. Sands, M. Charley said she would share additional information about the CIC and would ask its Director to provide some information about liability issues.

ADJOURN:

The meeting adjourned unanimously at 5:25 p.m. (F. Kirchner / M. Charley)

Shadrey Sands, Chair
Threshold Housing Commission

Lexington Virginia



Department of Planning and Development

Date, 2023

Property Owner
Mailing Address
Lexington, VA 24450

RE: Property Address, Lexington, Virginia

Dear Lexington Property Owner:

Lexington is experiencing a housing crunch and the Lexington Threshold Housing Commission is investigating ways to potentially increase housing supply. It appears the property you own at _____ may be vacant or underutilized and we are hoping you will be willing to share why the property is not being used. Are there any obstacles preventing the property from being used? And if so, what are those obstacles (title issues, limited resources for maintenance, back taxes owed, etc.)?

Admittedly, the City has limited resources, but we may be able to help make your property useable if we know why it is currently underutilized. We know this may be an invasive question about your private property, but please know our only reason for asking is to explore potential ways to increase the number of available housing units in Lexington.

Please call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Arne Glaeser
Director of Planning and Development