

April 25, 2022 Southside Neighborhood Meeting

Martinsville City Council toured the Southside area on April 25, 2022 beginning at 5:30pm. Those present for the tour were Mayor Lawson, Vice Mayor Bowles, Council Member Turner, Council Member Martin, and Council Member Pearson. Staff participating included City Manager Leon Towarnicki, Assistant City Manager/City Attorney Eric Monday, Police Chief Eddie Cassady, Officer Coretha Gravely, Inspector Andy Powers, Inspector Mark Price, Inspector Jeff Alderman, Community Development Manager Mark McCaskill, Hannah Powell, Building Inspector Kris Bridges and Bill Wyatt, reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin.

The tour began at 5:30 from the rear of the Municipal Building and traveled to Bridge Street, across Memorial Blvd to Cross Street, up to Park Street, and back through Wingfield and Roy Streets. The tour continued to South Street, Askin Street to Union and Knowl Streets, back to South Askin and down to DuPont Road, back up to Ranson Road and Oakgrove, across Memorial Blvd to Douglas Street, to English Street, Graves, Oak, and Summit Streets. The tour traveled back across Memorial Blvd to Cliff Street, Cole, Paul, Chalmers, Highland, and to Forest Street. From there they went to Childress St, Smith Lake Road, Village Street, back to Forest Street, down Aaron Street, Broad Street, Maple Street, and back to the Municipal Building where the tour concluded at approximately 6:30 pm. Along the route, Council Members and other attendees noticed a number of property maintenance issues and abandoned houses. In practically every case, Mark Price, Property Maintenance Inspector noted the property had already been posted. In some cases, if demolition is involved, the City is currently working through that process. If those with property maintenance concerns, most have already been turned over to Public Works for handling. Attendees observed a number of locations where vehicles were parked on the street facing the wrong direction; a number of locations where small pull-behind/utility trailers were on the street, and a number of basketball goals at the curb. Attendees also observed significant storage of vehicles and /equipment next to the rear of Southside Fire Station and on Childress. Attendees observed evidence of 4-wheelers along Smith Lake Road and along property that backs up to Southside Park; Police Chief Eddie Cassady stated that letters have been sent regarding this. A tractor cab was parked on the street in front of 1121 South Askin St.

The tour concluded at City Hall at 6:45 pm.

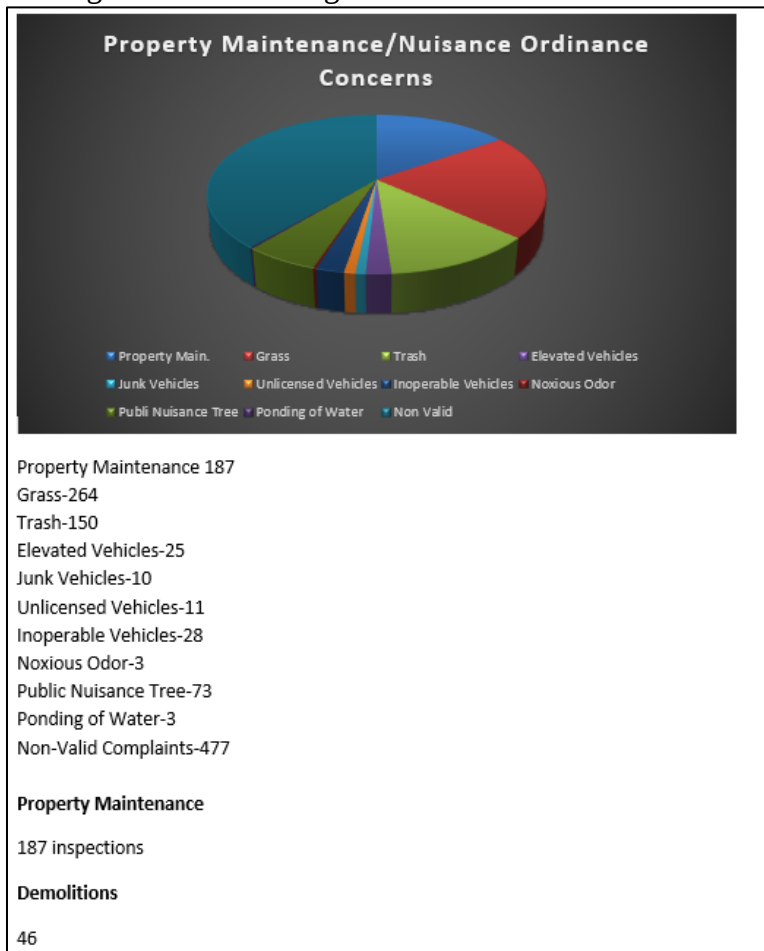
The Southside Neighborhood meeting was held at Fuller Memorial Church, 1204 Askin Street in Martinsville beginning at 7:30pm. Those present for the tour attended along with Clerk of Council Karen Roberts, Lieutenant Lovell, Officer Brown, and

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approximately 20 residents from the Southside area. Mayor Lawson called the meeting to order. Pastor Fred Hardin opened the meeting with a prayer. Mayor Lawson thanked Pastor Hardin for hosting the meeting at their church.

City Manager Towarnicki summarized the tour and reported that most houses/properties observed as possible code violations were confirmed to already be in the Property Maintenance system.

Mark Price, Code Compliance Inspector summarized inspections, notices and recognized those properties that required action. Price explained that all complaints are posted to the City website, follow-ups documented if the complaint is valid or invalid, and if any action is taken or needed. Price shared contact information and location of the Property Maintenance office for residents who need to report properties. Price explained the process of reporting properties and how Inspections follows up. Price explained that although a property may not look good, it may not necessarily be out of compliance. Kris Bridges explained that animals going into properties may not be a problem, for example the Department does not trigger action for rats. The property and individual condition may or may not be a violation so properties must be looked at on an individual basis. Right of entry is based on what officials can view from the street, including surrounding streets but there is a fine line in taking extraordinary efforts to view the concern. Homes are ranked in a fair and equitable way around the city so as not to target any specific street or neighborhood. Fire or structural damage is at the top of the Inspection list. Bridges explained the process for addressing homes for demolition, either by the property owner or by the City. About 50% of the time, property owners take care of the property once cited. Tina Barrett said she purchased the home at 203 Spring Street and found out after the sale that it was on the demolition list, they are repairing the home and she wants to ensure they are following the correct steps through Inspections. Bridges explained that there is a list of homes on the inspections list but only those scheduled for demolition are posted for public viewing. Once there is a plan of action on a condemned property, that pauses the steps toward demolition. Inspections has never refused a plan of action. A house is condemnable for having no power or water but can easily be removed from the list once those utilities are connected. City Attorney Monday encouraged residents to contact the City to find out what would need to be addressed to remove a home from the condemned list prior to signing a contract of purchase. Although rats are not addressed, the condition that attracts vermin can be.



A resident reported a home that has been condemned for months with rats, spiders, and trash in the backyard. There are children living there but they cannot reach the owner of the property. The occupants have tried to address those issues.

Vice Mayor Bowles relayed questions asked by residents. What if speeding is observed along residential streets, what can be done? What should a resident do if they suspect drug activity at a house? And what can be done about trash along residential streets? Police Chief Eddie Cassidy noted that the Police Department can run radar, set a speed sign in the area or place a ghost car on the street. Officer Gravely indicated that she could contact the property owner to let them know what kind of activity the tenants are suspected of. If there is trash at a specific property then contact the Inspections department. If the trash is in the street, residents should report this to Public Works.

Pastor Fred asked what could be done when a home is vacant and windows continue to be broken out. Price confirmed the homes referenced are on the demo list.

Linda Lawrey of Graves Street asked about 112 Summit Street; Price confirmed that it was on the demo list and property inspections list for grass.

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Officer Gravely said residents should take pride in their community and set an example for young people; if residents see trash then pick it up. Don't wait on someone else to do it. Gravely said she would provide the trash bags for anyone who wants to contact her. Everyone in the community should pitch in to keep communities clean.

Shawn Morton of 1023 Graves Street reports people throwing bumpers and car seats down the hill at her property and she's not able to clean that up any longer. Council Member Turner explained that Public Works could install no dumping signs which has helped some locations in the past. Turner asked if Public Works could review this location for sign installation.

Mary Spain, 1059 Graves Street expressed concern for littering in the area, including trash, garbage, tires and items that are not picked up with bulk trash.

Officer Gravely said the City can install no dumping signs but some people pay no attention to the signs. If residents see someone littering, try to get a tag number and car description. Lawson explained the bulk trash policy and encouraged residents to call and schedule bulk trash pickup.

Misty Thompson, expressed concern on her brother's behalf regarding the house across the road from 912 Askin Street, stating there is trash everywhere.

Darwin Belcher of 119 Village Street said nothing has been done to the road in the 30 years he's lived there. Towarnicki explained that the street is long with little traffic and the estimate to pave that street would take up the full paving budget, however they are researching options.

Irvin Carter 107 Village Street said he has spent a lot of money on his car being knocked out of alignment from the condition of the road. Carter also referenced issues with 4-wheelers on that street. Monday explained that the 4-wheeler concern will be addressed very soon. Carter expressed concern for drug use on Village Street and shootings which have been reported to the Police Department. He asked if there was a way to contact the property owner to notify them of occupant drug use. Cassady said they have a lot of resources going into addressing his concerns. Once the Police Department has proof, the property owner is notified that drugs are being sold and that the property would be subject to seizure. That gives the landlord the right to evict those residents. Rental inspection and drug blight can be used to address those concerns.

Jimmy Barbour of 126 Village Street expressed the same concerns regarding the condition of the street and the 4-wheelers.

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Linda Lawry expressed concern that Martinsville Hospital would be closing the maternity ward. It's unacceptable to deliver a baby in the emergency room with no prenatal or postnatal care available. Mayor Lawson said because Danville is part of the same organization, customers may be airlifted to Danville or Roanoke for services not provided at Martinsville. Vice Mayor Bowles said the hospital blames the closures partially on the nursing shortage. Bowles asked if a representative of the hospital could attend a future council meeting to update residents on the decisions being made. Council Member Turner said if Martinsville reverts to a town, it will open the door to solutions to assist in medical care as well as other avenues in the future. Council Member Pearson said she's heard rumors that the hospital would be closing completely. It's hard to grow a city if you do not have a vibrant medical center.

City Manager Towarnicki and Police Chief Cassady introduced the staff and officers that were in attendance.

Mayor Lawson asked residents their opinion of the Oak Street Park; would residents prefer to see the park go away or would they prefer to have the park updated. Linda Lawrey said bouncing a basketball at the park reverberates in her home and there are trees that have fallen on the back fence. Council Member Martin asked if the community could benefit from a community garden which received some interest. Residents expressed concern about the soil in that area, stating that some homes were condemned because of the ground. Lawson will get input on the neighborhood parks and if Oak Street Park serves no purpose then they will find another use for that area. There will be a survey on the city website for residents to offer opinions.

With no further questions, the meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Karen Roberts
Clerk of Council

Kathy Lawson
Mayor