

Inspections Small Group Meeting Notes | 2015

May 28, 2015 from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. BC City Hall

Present: Marcie Gillette, Talia Champlin, Hans Stark, John Sims, Steve Bueller, Joe Neuman, Tom Beuchler, Mayor Deb Owens, Archie Crooks, Annie Stetler, Rebecca Fleury, Laura Otte and Amanda Lanker

Rebecca Fleury opened the meeting by thanking everyone for their participation. Marcie Gillette will be the primary point of contact for the group moving forward in her role as Community Services Director although Rebecca will continue to attend as well. Some people in the group commented on an increase in responsiveness from the department since this process has begun. Some noted that they've seen and experienced a positive difference/change.

To support shared success and progress, the group engaged in discussion about expectations and norms specific to the partnership forming as a result of the current efforts to improve Battle Creek's ability to be business-friendly. The group was asked to give further consideration of how they communicate, address conflicts, talk about the work the group is doing, etc.

The group agreed the following shared commitments are important:

1. **Transparency**- as agreed upon in the previous meeting, the small group would like to continue making notes and documents publicly accessible
2. **Confidentiality**- the group feels it is important to be mindful of how matters are discussed, particularly identifying staff or partners by name and the implications of attribution of comments.
3. **Responsibility to be Advocates and Champions**- believing in Battle Creek, committing to sharing positive stories of the progress the group has made, and agreeing to serve as helpful resource in the community when people or partners the group encounters expresses a concern or negative comment is important to the group.

(For example, recently a person in the group had someone tell them they were having problems with the city's code department. After asking a few questions to better understand what was going on, the person that shared the negative experience/perception decided that the city's code department was not the cause of the situation.)

Marcie Gillette provided the group with an overview of the Inspections and Code Compliance Departments. This action was taken in response to discussion from the previous meeting that noted an opportunity to gain clarity about the two departments. Notes from the overview and discussion include:

- Inspections Department enforces state regulations for commercial and residential properties for building, plumbing, electrical and mechanical standards.
- Code Compliance enforces the locally determined minimum housing standards for residential properties only. It also enforces interior standards as outlined in the rental property ordinance.
 - Note: there is currently no code that addresses commercial property maintenance. The city is working to address this and aims to close this gap within the next few months by adopting the International Property Maintenance Code.
- Sometimes people mistake assessments for inspections. Two separate processes.
- Staff availability and time- how can we improve processes to create more efficiencies? Is there adequate time for the plan review process and how is that impacting interactions between inspectors and contractors, etc.? Consideration of a work study analysis.
- The Home Builder's Association communicates/advocates issues and opportunities related to inspections at the state level.
- Older homes- what needs to be considered in the code and inspections process specific to older homes in Battle Creek? How can we better avoid negative impact on the lack of clarity/inconsistency enforcements can have on owners of older homes when they are adding/revising/upgrading property?

Documents provided by Marcie Gillette for review and feedback:

Code Enforcement Checklist- document that speaks to what code officers look for when examining the exterior, yard, interior, mechanical system, smoke detectors, and safety of a residence. The group noted it would be helpful to have something similar for vacant and abandoned health and safety upgrades.

Trade Permit Process- document outlining the timeline and process related to obtaining and closing of a trade permit

Building (Roofing and Siding) Permit Process- document outlining the timeline and process related to obtaining and closing of building permit

Vacant and Abandoned Building FAQ- document with frequently asked questions and answers related to vacant and abandoned buildings. The group identified opportunity to share this information with realtors, people purchasing property.

Vacant and Abandoned Property Enforcement Process- document describing enforcement action used for all properties deemed vacant and abandoned

What Every Property Owner Should Know or Ask- document to assist a current owner or potential buyer regarding property services overseen by the City of Battle Creek

Community Services Department Org Chart- organizational chart for the City of Battle Creek's Community Services Department. The group briefly discussed changing the "Code Official" job description for staff responsible for enforcing code compliance, noting that is the term used to refer to inspectors at the state level and could be a possible source of confusion related to the two departments.

Timeline Highlights of the Inspections Conversations and Small Workgroup- document noting the progress and actions related to the current collaborative efforts to improve Battle Creek's ability to be a more business-friendly community.

Identified Opportunities and Next Steps:

- Send "What Every Property Owner Should Know or Ask" to realtors and title offices, distribute in water bills, post on website.
- City take a position on hard-wired smoke detectors to improve clarity and consistency of inspections
- Small group will send any notes/suggestions related to the documents provided to Marcie Gillette
- Create checklist for Vacant and Abandoned health and safety upgrades to identify specific requirements that property owners may need address to get an occupancy permit
- Incorporate appeals process in orders
- The information from the site visits to Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids were helpful. It would be helpful to the group if a more comprehensive comparison was provided which included information from the City of Battle Creek (permits, budget, population, residential/commercial properties, etc.)
- Data theming of inspections conversations scheduled for June 16 from 2-4pm, location to be determined

Next Meeting

Inspections Data Theming- Tuesday, June 16 from 2-4pm location to be determined