

City of San Antonio



Minutes Planning and Community Development Committee

2021 – 2023 Council Members

Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4
Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3 | Teri Castillo, Dist. 5
Rosie Castro, Dist. 7 | John Courage, Dist. 9

Monday, March 20, 2023

10:00 AM

Council Briefing Room

The Planning and Community Development Council Committee convened a regular meeting in City Hall beginning at 10:00 AM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

Members Present: Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, *Chair*
Phyllis Viagran, *Member*
Teri Castillo, *Member*
Rosie Castro, *Member*
John Courage, *Member*

Members Absent: None

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of minutes from February 23, 2023 Planning and Community Development Committee

Councilmember Courage moved to Approve the minutes of the February 23, 2023 Planning and Community Development meeting. Councilmember Castro seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Rocha Garcia, Viagran, Castillo, Castro, Courage

Consent Agenda

2. Resolution of No Objection for Spanish Pecan Apts, LP's application for 2023 Non-Competitive 4% Housing Tax Credits (HTC) from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) for the rehabilitation of a 256-unit affordable

multi-family rental housing development named Spanish Pecan Apartments, located at 6835 & 6840 Pecan Valley Drive in Council District 3. [Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager; Veronica Garcia, Director, Neighborhood and Housing Services]

Councilmember Viagran moved to Approve on the Consent Agenda. Councilmember Castillo seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Rocha Garcia, Viagran, Castillo, Castro, Courage

- 3. Resolution of No Objection for Winston Roselawn Apts, LP's application for 2023 Non- Competitive 4% Housing Tax Credits (HTC) from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) for the rehabilitation of a 208-unit affordable multi-family rental housing development named Winston Roselawn Apartments, located at 2506 S. General McMullen Drive & 3346 Roselawn Road in Council District 5.** [Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager; Veronica Garcia, Director, Neighborhood and Housing Services]

Councilmember Viagran moved to Approve on the Consent Agenda. Councilmember Castillo seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Rocha Garcia, Viagran, Castillo, Castro, Courage

Briefing and Possible Action on

- 4. Briefing and possible action on the recommended update to Chapter 28, Signs and Billboards, by adopting the proposed amendments recommended by the Building-Related and Fire Codes Appeals and Advisory Board.** [Roderick Sanchez, Assistant City Manager; Michael Shannon, Director, Development Services]

Director of the Development Services Department, Michael Shannon, presented an overview of City Code Section 28 also known as the Sign Code. Shannon stated that the 17 member Building-Related Fire Codes Appeals and Advisory Board (BRFCAAB) and its subcommittee, consisting of nonvoting members of the community, considered the update of the sign code and made the recommendations proposed. Shannon mentioned that the subcommittee had met 22 times.

Shannon provided the definition of on-premise versus off premise signs and noted that the purpose of the sign code, established in the 1980s, was to reduce the number of off-premise signs. Shannon reviewed all recommended sign code changes including removing the digital billboard prohibition from the Hill Country Gateway Corridor for a maximum of 25% of the total on-premise signage, allowing up to eight static billboards per year to be converted to digital by removing four static billboards with designated areas of protection (near downtown, US 281 towards downtown, Historic Designations, Hill Country Gateway Corridor and including 40 hours per year of public service announcements (PSA) for use by the City), and allowing an increase to the height of signs along the highway to accommodate construction of new highway flyovers.

Shannon stated that there were 19 recommended sign code amendments, four amendments

proposed that were not recommended due to need for more review and analysis, and one change made administratively. Shannon recommended approval of the BRFCAC approved changes to the sign code.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Rocha Garcia recommended development of a process to address neighborhood concerns related to the proposed changes and the changes requiring more analysis. Shannon stated that more than 700 notices were mailed to the community which invited them to the meetings, but only about 10 residents attended. Chair Rocha Garcia supported limiting the number of billboards as they caused visual clutter. She requested a report to the City Council with a map tracking the electronic billboard installations and supported the 40 hours of PSAs per digital billboard. She supported consideration of an Arts & Entertainment overlay not just downtown, but in other areas of town which she felt warranted more discussion.

Councilmember Courage stated that he was not concerned with on-premise signs except when those were too bright for nearby residences at night. Shannon stated that his staff investigated complaints of signs exceeding the lumens limit and issued citations if necessary. Councilmember Courage recommended excluding additional signage, particularly digital billboards, on corridors designated as dangerous through the Vision Zero Program. Councilmember Courage requested clarification on the adjustment of heights and expressed concern that five permits were issued erroneously in 2015 but it appeared the mistake was being corrected by grandfathering the signs rather than removing them.

Councilmember Castillo agreed with Councilmember Courage regarding his concern for safety and billboards in Vision Zero areas. Councilmember Castillo recommended more art and opportunities for small businesses outside of downtown.

Councilmember Castro asked if there were any studies related to driver distraction as a result of the digital billboards. Shannon stated that the reports were mixed. Councilmember Castro supported the Arts & Entertainment District both downtown and outside downtown.

Councilmember Viagran recommended that Councilmember Pelaez review changes to the Hill Country Corridor. She suggested that on-premise signs for small businesses might be helpful to lead customers to them as a wayfinding effort along the highways.

Councilmember Courage expressed concern that subcommittee members were not allowed to vote. Shannon stated that the current BRFCAC Board bylaws made them non-voting members. Councilmember Courage noted that billboards including digital billboards were designed to attract the eyes of drivers which was distracting and, therefore, he did not support the increased digital advertising. He reiterated the need for more analysis of dangerous roads. Councilmember Courage requested information on how many billboards/digital billboards were within the small cities around San Antonio. Shannon stated that 750 signs were in the entire extraterritorial jurisdiction but he would need to research the information on those in the small cities such as Balcones Heights and Leon Valley.

Chair Rocha Garcia supported discussion related to the number of signs and limitations on signs located on dangerous roads as well as changes to the bylaws to allow subcommittee members to vote.

Councilmember Viagran moved to approve and forward the recommended changes to the sign code to the full City Council for consideration with more discussion at full City Council on the Digital Art Signs and the Arts & Entertainment Corridors. Councilmember Castillo seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Rocha Garcia, Viagran, Castillo, Castro
No: Courage

5. Briefing and possible action related to the Vacant Building Program in response to the Council Consideration Request by Councilmembers Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia and John Courage [Lori Houston, Assistant City Manager; Shanon Shea Miller, Director, Office of Historic Preservation]

Shanon Miller, Director of the Office of Historic Preservation (OHP), provided background and status of the Vacant Building Program (VBP) which began in 2014 as a pilot program. Miller clarified that in 2017, a Vacant Building Ordinance was established for historic districts and landmarks, the downtown central business district, neighborhood conservation districts, Port San Antonio, Brooks City Base, local military bases, City-initiated Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones and a half mile buffer around areas; the Ordinance only applied to 100% vacant buildings.

Miller provided a chart of the 917 total active cases and commented that over a thousand properties had been in the VBP but were brought into compliance by being repaired, occupied, or had a new owner. Miller listed the following partnering departments for the VBP in addition to OHP: Economic Development (EDD), Development Services Department (DSD), Neighborhood and Housing Services Department (NHSD), and the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD). The program hosted quarterly property owner assistance events, displayed a vacant building dashboard, managed a solution task force, reviewed zoning assessments and coordinated with the SAPD Problem-Oriented Place Based Strategy (POPBS) to reduce crime.

Miller recommended a phased expansion to be considered in the annual budget process to include a buffer around schools and additional program services.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Rocha Garcia recommended consideration of vacant lots in addition to structures. Miller noted that there was a process for the program and listed the steps that a property owner could take to bring their properties into compliance which also included a fee the property owner would pay. Chair Rocha Garcia suggested adding representatives from the Bexar County Appraisal District (BCAD) or the Tax Assessor Collector's Office on the Task Force. Chair Rocha Garcia supported expansion of the buffer area around schools as proposed by Councilmember Castillo.

Councilmember Courage supported the owners filing a no trespass with SAPD to allow more tools for enforcement. Councilmember Courage requested a map of the area currently in the

Program and the area to be included in the first expansion phase. He recommended targeting new Program participants to ensure participation in the educational opportunities.

Councilmember Castillo supported the expansion of the Program to include a buffer around schools as the current definition left most of Council District 5 out of the Program. Councilmember Castillo recommended connecting the dashboard to the community land trust and land banking programs as well as the Strategic Housing Implementation Plan (SHIP). Councilmember Castillo supported Chair Rocha Garcia's recommendation to include BCAD in the Task Force and also recommended using the Dangerous Assessment Response Team (DART) Program model around the schools. Miller noted that crime and safety challenges associated with vacant properties precipitated creation of the VBP.

Councilmember Viagran had suggested a review of zoning for properties in the Program and was pleased that OHP was implementing her suggestion. Councilmember Viagran mentioned that neighbors often knew what was going on with the vacant properties and supported the POPBS to help reduce criminal activity. Councilmember Viagran suggested a review of property owners as many were out-of-town Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs) that did not pay attention to the impacts they were making in the neighborhood and could hide their identities behind their corporate status.

Councilmember Castro mentioned that there were some properties in Council District 7 owned by a man from New York which were contributing to neighborhood issues and suggested that OHP coordinate with City Council staff, but wanted a stronger plan from EDD to redevelop the property. Miller stated that EDD was included in the quarterly meetings and they would connect to the Council District 7 council office to troubleshoot the particular property of concern.

Councilmember Castro asked about the participation of OHP in demolitions as she was concerned about the demolition of senior citizen's homes. Miller stated that her office reviewed historic buildings and worked to ensure that the neighbors were aware of the building demolitions. DSD Director Michael Shannon added that the property owners were connected with resources such as the Demolition Diversion Program, Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation Program and the Under One Roof Program and offered a one-on-one briefing to the Councilmember. NHSD Director Veronica Garcia stated that her department was hiring two new full time employees to assist with outreach and coordination of homeowners and help them navigate the various program resources.

Councilmember Castillo expressed concern that the dashboard could result in more speculation and purchasing of homes to cause more displacement and gentrification. Councilmember Castillo asked how violent crime was increased due to vacant properties. Miller stated that the expansion of the VBP considered all types of crime which the vacant properties contributed, not just violent crime.

Councilmember Courage suggested including properties referred by other programs even if they were not included in the expansion area and noted that in his council district there were commercial properties that could benefit from the program.

Item was for briefing only, so no action was taken.

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, Chair Rocha Garcia adjourned the meeting at 11:29 a.m.

Approved

Adriana Rocha Garcia, Chair

Debbie Racca-Sittre, City Clerk