

**MINUTES OF THE  
WATERTOWN CITY COUNCIL**  
Workshop Meeting Tuesday, July 9, 2019

Steve Washburn  
Deborah Everson  
Lindsay Guetzkow  
Adam Pawelk  
Michael Walters

1. Blight & Nuisance Codes

Mayor Steve Washburn called the Watertown City Council Workshop to order at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 09, 2019 in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

Council Members present: Washburn, Michael Walters, Deborah Everson, Lindsay Guetzkow, and Adam Pawelk.

City Staff present: City Administrator Shane Fineran, City Attorney Jared Shepherd, City Planner Mark Kaltsas, and Clerk/Treasurer Lynn Tschudi.

City Administrator Shane Fineran stated in May of 2019, City Council considered a zoning amendment for the storage and parking of vehicles on private property. That ordinance amendment did not pass, however it addressed a city problem with nuisance and blight on residential property. Fineran said 60 residents have received violation letters in 2019. The city currently operates on a complaint basis for blight and nuisances. Thirty percent of the time further action is taken by the city on the violations.

Walters asked what the waiting period is after the initial letter is sent. Fineran said seven to ten days.

Guetzkow asked if a hearing is pursued, does the city code stand up or is it too vague.

City Attorney Jared Shepherd said there has not been an instance where the court has found an issue with city code language. Shepherd said in many cases, there is a violation in the zoning code as well as the ordinance. In these instances, different action is taken due to state statute. Shepherd reviewed the different types of nuisances. Shepherd said when enforcing a nuisance, the city needs to think about safety and due process. He said enforcement takes time and money for cities, so most do operate on a complaint basis. Shepherd gave an example of a current violation and the legal costs associated with the violation.

Everson asked if residents are provided the steps taken on the violation letter. Fineran said the city usually uses general language of, "additional action will be taken". Guetzkow asked if the city can recuperate attorney fees from residents. Shepherd said generally no.

Washburn asked council for their opinion on nuisance enforcement. Pawelk said he thinks it is important to keep city code updated, but if that is done, the city needs to enforce it. Walters said the nuisance code protects the next door neighbor without being too regulatory. Everson would be interested in enhancing the current code rather than adding code. She would like residents to feel like the city is enforcing complaints. Guetzkow said residents may assume the city is not taking action on a complaint because they are unaware of the process being taken behind the scenes.

Shepherd said the reason cities operate on a complaint basis is to protect them from selective enforcement. If the city operated proactively, a policy would need to be adopted. Fineran said in general, the city communicates with the person making the complaint so they know the result will not be immediate. Shepherd explained the process of serving a complaint and filing.

Watertown resident Nicolas Hoese approached the podium to address council. He reiterated that one man's trash is another man's treasure. He expressed concern for his property values declining due to blight on a neighboring property. Norm Bauer thanked council for looking into this matter. He asked the council how they want the city of Watertown to look. He said most main roads in Watertown contain properties which could be cleaned up.

Washburn said this is a very important item. He agreed with Hoeser in that blight can absolutely deter buyers. Washburn would like to see the code cleaned up to address the accumulation of items stored outside. Washburn asked Shepherd if our current code allows the city to enforce accumulation of junk. Shepherd said yes. Everson asked how the city can address township properties. Fineran said that would be the county ordinances and up to them to enforce.

Kaltsas asked if the city has the tools to remove certain junk. He gave examples of possible scenarios where the city may not be able to enforce the code. Guetzkow agreed that our resources are limited and she is in favor of a community service officer to enforce the code.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:32 pm.