

Roll Call

The Kalamazoo City Commission met in special session as a Committee of the Whole on Saturday, February 19, 2022 at 8:45 a.m. at The Foundry, located at 600 East Michigan Avenue.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Mayor David Anderson
Vice Mayor Don Cooney
Qianna Decker
Jeanne Hess
Stephanie Hoffman
Esteven Juarez
Chris Praedel

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

None

Also present were City Manager Jim Ritsema, City Attorney Clyde Robinson, and City Clerk Scott Borling.

Public Comments

Next, when an opportunity was given for general public comments, the following people addressed the City Commission:

An unnamed speaker asked the City to improve the access to public buildings and public meetings.

Tina McClinton, City resident, asked the City to recognize the Southtown Neighborhood and accept the Southtown Neighborhood Plan as part of the City's Master Plan.

Emma Baidy spoke about affordable housing and asked that the City require landlords of affordable housing units to rent to non-violent felons.

Richard Stewart, City resident, objected that call-in public comments were not being received at this meeting. Mr. Stewart asked that the City acknowledge the Southtown Neighborhood, accept the Southtown Neighborhood Plan, and address the frequent flooding that occurred in Southtown.

Kay, a City resident, asked for fundamental changes in how the City was run and described how she was assaulted by officers from the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety.

Abby VandenBerg thanked the people who spoke during public comments and stated she did not realize City residents were dealing with so many issues and concerns. Ms. VandenBerg expressed a desire to be involved in the community.

Discussion of the City
Commission's Priorities:
Affordable Housing, Gun
Violence, and Youth
Development

City Manager Ritsema provided introductory remarks and reviewed the agenda and desired outcomes for the meeting. City staff delivered a presentation entitled *City Commission 2022 Retreat*. A copy of the slides from this presentation was filed with the papers for the meeting.

ARPA Overview & Current Community Priorities

Management Services Director and Chief Financial Officer Steve Vicenzi reviewed the timeline, process, and priorities used for allocating American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

United Way ARPA Grant Overview

Deputy City Manager Laura Lam provided a statistical snapshot of the application process and funding recipients for the United Way Disaster Relief Fund.

In response to questions and comments from Commissioners, Deputy City Manager Lam and Director Vicenzi provided the following information:

- all of the disaster relief funds had been deployed. The deployment of additional funds was a possibility, and the United Way was a willing partner.
- the City was in contact with Kalamazoo County about gun violence prevention funding, and those connections could be used to discuss their ARPA funds application process. The County seemed pleased with the consultant they were using to help administer their ARPA funds.

Affordable Housing

Community Planning and Economic Director Rebekah Kik discussed housing strategy approaches. Director Kik presented the *Aligned Housing Strategy for Development and Impact*, described housing goals/challenges/potential solutions, reviewed the 2022 housing development budget, and discussed steps for achieving success that went beyond resources.

The meeting recessed at 10:18 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 10:33 a.m.

Next, an opportunity was given for City Commission questions and discussion about affordable housing and the City's housing strategy.

In response to questions and comments from Commissioners, Director Kik, Deputy City Manager Jeff Chamberlain, and Community Investment Manager Antonio Mitchell provided the following information:

- the City had requested a copy of the Southtown Neighborhood Plan multiple times but had not received it.
- the City was in the process of launching a new, updated website. The new site was online for the Foundation for Excellence (FFE) and the Parks and Recreation Department. The City's main website (kalamazoocity.org) would be updated in the next 30-60 days.
- Neighborhood Business and Special Projects Coordinator Melody Daacon was working with 30 minority contractors to get certifications and project development training. The Home Builders Association of Western Michigan was a partner in this work.

Mayor Anderson noted the City was doing a lot of good work on housing, but there was a disconnect with people in the community not knowing what the City was doing.

Vice Mayor Cooney observed that Director Kik's strategies were long-term strategies, and he questioned what the City was going to do for people with immediate housing needs.

Discussion of the City Commission's Priorities: Affordable Housing, Gun Violence, and Youth Development (cont'd)

Recess

Discussion of the City
Commission's Priorities:
Affordable Housing, Gun
Violence, and Youth
Development (cont'd)

Commissioner Juarez stated there was a disconnect between the City's actions and its communication with the community, which was creating a trust gap. Commissioner Juarez questioned what the City could do to facilitate two-way communication with residents and build trust. Commissioner Juarez suggested communication tools, including community listening sessions organized by City Commissioners and the distribution of informational flyers and door hangers. Commissioner Juarez stated the City needed to be unorthodox about the targets of its communication.

Commissioner Decker agreed with Commissioner Juarez and stated the City needed to do a better job of marketing itself and following-up with people who made the effort to connect with the City. Commissioner Decker stated the City needed to address both long term and immediate needs. Commissioner Decker indicated she would reach out to Mr. Stewart regarding the Southtown Neighborhood Plan.

Commissioner Hess questioned how the City's housing plans were going to move forward given the shortage of workers in the skilled trades. Commissioner Hess encouraged the City to be aware of energy efficiency and the forthcoming Sustainability Plan as it created or rehabilitated housing units.

Commissioner Juarez suggested the City use smaller, local construction companies in addition to large developers. Commissioner Juarez suggested the City create a series of short videos covering various topics and post them on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, as these social media sites were the primary sources of news and information for many people.

Commissioner Hoffman stated the method for calculating Average Median Income (AMI) was a challenge for the City because the AMI was very different in the Northside, Eastside, and Edison Neighborhoods compared to the Oakland/Winchell Neighborhood.

Commissioner Praedel expressed excitement about the City's housing plans and stated the Commission needed to get the community excited about this work. Commissioner spoke about the importance of consistent communication all the time – not just when there was a crisis – and he expressed support for the idea of meeting people where they were from a communication standpoint. Commissioner Praedel remarked on the intersectionality of public policy issues such as infant mortality/environmental issues and housing rehabilitation/historic preservation. Commissioner Praedel discussed the benefits of home sharing programs. Commissioner Praedel encouraged the City to focus on strategies that had a low cost but high impact. Commissioner Praedel stated the City needed to invest more resources in communications.

Vice Mayor Cooney stated the skilled trades were anxious to partner with the City for apprenticeships.

Mayor Anderson spoke about the need to have different housing strategies to impact different areas, and he spoke about the importance of home ownership and pre- and post-purchase credit repair and counseling. Regarding zoning, Mayor Anderson noted there were divergent views about what was needed or desirable, with community input sometimes supporting less density and opposing affordable housing in particular areas. Mayor Anderson observed it could be difficult to balance macro zoning ideas and site-specific zoning. Mayor Anderson highlighted

the need for the City to get to scale with its programs, align its intentions with federal/state/county funds, and grow the local workforce. Mayor Anderson stated housing was a real thing and not a concept, and he noted The LIFT Foundation was engaged in a project that would provide 60 units for the unhoused.

Community Investment Manager Mitchell noted staff were collecting Commissioners' questions and comments and would provide answers.

In response to a request from Vice Mayor Cooney, Director Kik stated she would send Commissioners a full-sized version of her slides along with the notes from her presentation.

City Manager Ritsema stated it was his goal to improve the City's communications.

Short Term Housing

Deputy City Manager Lam reviewed the City's work on short term housing issues.

Vice Mayor Cooney stated the City Commission needed to translate its passion for the unhoused into a workable plan. Vice Mayor Cooney indicated Lee Adams at the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research was developing a housing strategy for Kalamazoo County, and he suggested the City create an asset map of the organizations in the City that were working on housing. Vice Mayor Cooney distributed a draft document entitled Towards and Asset Map for Housing in Kalamazoo. A copy of this document was filed with the papers for this meeting.

Commissioner Praedel expressed appreciation that the City was willing to take risks and stated the City could not afford to not take risks. Commissioner Praedel noted housing resource information was in many different places, and he suggested the City consolidate and categorize the information and make it more accessible. Commissioner Praedel stated information on housing resources should include a list of groups that would be interested in mobilizing around various issues, such as housing for families with children or home repairs for seniors.

Commissioner Decker expressed support for including organizations that offered other services, like providing meals, and not just housing-specific services. Commissioner Decker suggested the City make this information available on its new website.

Commissioner Praedel expressed concerns about the City being able to keep housing resource information up to date on its website.

Commissioner Hoffman stated the Kalamazoo County Continuum of Care would be able to help with resource mapping and gathering/maintaining information on housing resources. In response to a question from Commissioner Praedel, Commissioner Hoffman stated the Continuum of Care had a Board of Directors.

The meeting recessed at 11:33 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 12:31 p.m.

Discussion of the City Commission's Priorities: Affordable Housing, Gun Violence, and Youth Development (cont'd)

Recess

Discussion of the City Commission's Priorities: Affordable Housing, Gun Violence, and Youth Development (cont'd)

Gun Violence Prevention & Intervention Efforts

Mayor Anderson introduced a discussion of gun violence prevention and intervention efforts.

Vice Mayor Cooney talked about the book *Bleeding Out* and stated it would be the focus of a community book discussion sponsored by the Lewis Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations, one of the City's partners.

Commissioner Juarez described the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) and Change of Status programs. Commissioner Juarez stated traditional violence intervention programs did not work for people who had experienced a high level of trauma.

Public Safety Chief Vernon Coakley stated the approach to law enforcement he had learned was the wrong approach in many ways, and KDPS had taken the wrong approach to policing for many years. Chief Coakley stated KDPS was changing, and he spoke about the need for the community to be involved in solving the problem of gun violence. Chief Coakley remarked on the City's partnership with the Lewis Walker Institute and discussed the book *Bleeding Out*.

Deputy Public Safety Chief Dave Boysen described the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the GVI program. Deputy Chief Boysen stated enhancements to existing gun violence strategies included addressing trauma, providing programs and services, and ensuring consistency and accountability in the criminal justice system. Deputy Chief Boysen stated GVI worked because the outreach workers were respected on the street and were able to build relationships with those who needed it. Deputy Chief Boysen remarked that GVI had changed KDPS because officers were focusing law enforcement efforts on the people who were committing crimes. Deputy Chief Boysen described value of outreach workers and stated more resources were needed for mentors/outreach workers.

Commissioner Juarez stated gun violence was a by-product of systemic racism, and he offered remarks on stopping the violence while addressing the underlying cause. Commissioner Juarez stated the community needed to see continuing action for trust to be built, and he commended Chief Coakley and Deputy Chief Boysen for saying "We've done it wrong."

Commissioner Praedel offered comments on the shortage of mental health services in general and the possibility of training pastors and outreach workers to deal with the trauma created by gun violence.

In response to Commissioner Praedel, Commissioner Juarez noted GVI was only part of the solution, as it addressed a specific type of gun violence. Commissioner Juarez stated the current discussion with the Lewis Walker Institute was around other groups that were doing work on gun violence. Commissioner Juarez indicated gun violence induced trauma required different solutions than those offered by traditional mental health providers; most professional therapists did not have training in this area.

Commissioner Hoffman stated the Black and Brown Collective housed at Rooted could be a good source of mental health professionals who could be trained as gun violence trauma specialists. Commissioner Hoffman spoke about the need to address both gun violence and systemic racism. Commissioner Hoffman noted gun violence was a countywide issue and not just a City issue.

Vice Mayor Cooney expressed support for addressing gun-based trauma and helping GVI with resources, including giving outreach workers health insurance.

Commissioner Juarez urged the City to hold the Kalamazoo County Commission and Chairperson Quinn accountable for the commitments that had been made regarding funding for gun violence prevention.

Mayor Anderson stated he was not satisfied with speed of the County's response regarding the gun violence partnership, and he noted gun violence would intensify as the weather got warmer. Mayor Anderson stated the City needed to present proposals to the County and other partners with a sense of urgency, as it would take time to get initiatives in place once funding was approved.

Youth Development Sub-Committee

Commissioner Hess, Commissioner Juarez, and Vice Mayor Cooney provided the following update from the Youth Development Subcommittee:

- the Subcommittee was working for the greater good, but silos were keeping them from moving forward.
- two meetings had taken place; five or six more meetings were anticipated.
- the meetings included the City Commission Subcommittee members, Meg Blinkewitz, Executive Director of the Kalamazoo Youth Development Network (KYDNet), and representatives from the City Manager's Office, Parks and Recreation Department, Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS), and the community.
- the group was working on plans (what to accomplish), measures of success, strategies, a timeline, roles, and accountabilities
- the Subcommittee wanted to increase the involvement of youth from the Eastside, Edison, and Northside Neighborhoods.
- many partners were involved in this work, and there were a lot of resources available.
- KPS was open to the idea of having school facilities available on evenings and weekends for youth programs. Involving KPS and using school facilities for these programs was very important.
- the City needed to compensate people at a reasonable hourly rate to work with kids. There was a need for gap funding that was flexible.
- the Subcommittee was looking at a Police Athletic League and Super Summer Events as possible programs.
- the community needed a master plan for youth, which would show where kids needed to be at various ages and grade levels. The resources required to reach the goals in the plan needed to be identified, and there needed to be a collective response to mobilize all the resources in the community.

Discussion of the City Commission's Priorities: Affordable Housing, Gun Violence, and Youth Development (cont'd)

Discussion of the City Commission's Priorities: Affordable Housing, Gun Violence, and Youth Development (cont'd)

City Manager Ritsema noted the City's relationship with KPS was different now, and he indicated the City needed to support KPS and Superintendent Rita.

Commissioner Decker suggested the City get businesses involved in youth programs, and she pointed out banks needed to demonstrate community investment and volunteer hours.

Commissioner Praedel encouraged the City to give the community a "north star" for everyone to focus on, a big vision like the Harlem Children's Zone in New York City, and funders would give to the non-profit organizations doing the work. Commissioner Praedel suggested an individualized plan for each child that would foster their interests and treat them like individual people.

Commissioner Juarez offered that The Kalamazoo Promise was the community's north star, and he questioned how the City could make The Promise more robust and available to all parts of the community. Commissioner Juarez observed some ships were damaged and had holes in them; when the tide rose, they stayed at the bottom.

Commissioner Hess stated the City Commission needed to make sure the Parks and Recreation Department was resourced to do the work.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 1:47 p.m.
The meeting resumed at 2:10 p.m.

Discussion of Community Priorities

Next, Deputy City Manager Lam facilitated City Commission discussion about priorities and next steps, which resulted in the following points:

- Economic Impact was a broad category that included poverty reduction.
- the big list of priorities was pulled from the City Commission priorities from 2021, the Strategic Goals, and the Community Survey. Everything on those lists seemed to fall into one of the five main priorities: Economic Impact/Economy, Infrastructure, Housing, Youth, and Safety.
- the 2021 retreat was good because it was informed by multiple sources of community-input.
- the five priorities should be a standing item for discussion on City Commission meeting agendas.
- Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (DEI), prosperity, and sustainability should be woven through all of the City Commission priorities.
- community revitalization needed to include development of both downtown and the core neighborhoods.
- the City did not have expertise in any and every area; issues will come up that divert attention and resources. The City Commission and City Administration need to be thoughtful about limits on the organization's capacity.

- the City Administration was willing to use outside organizations and consultants to help with the work so staff could address all five of the Commission's priorities. Having priorities, plans, and partnerships in place would give staff direction to respond to crises.
- staff and Commissioners needed to consider whether they were expecting affordable housing to address homelessness or if homelessness needed to be addressed as a separate issue. The City's approach to this point had been to look at affordable housing through the lens of a continuum, from homelessness to home ownership.
- the City needed to bridge the communication gap. City Commissioners would hold monthly or every-other-month listening sessions in the community to intentionally engage residents. Deputy City Manager Lam would meet with Commissioners Decker and Praedel to coordinate these meetings and ensure effective communication and marketing.
- Economic Development staff would work with the City Manager's Office to coordinate Commissioner involvement in business-related ribbon cutting events.

Discussion of the City Commission's Priorities: Affordable Housing, Gun Violence, and Youth Development (cont'd)

Discussion of Next Steps

Deputy City Manager Chamberlain indicated staff would be looking at the three topics discussed at this meeting as well as the Strategic Vision and other City Commission priorities. Staff would develop strategic plans for each priority, as well as low-cost, high impact strategies. Deputy City Manager Chamberlain acknowledged that Commissioners wanted to move quickly on the topics discussed today and that staff needed to do better at engaging residents with the information they wanted in the format they wanted. Deputy City Manager Chamberlain noted the importance of identifying partners for the work. Deputy City Manager Chamberlain stated future Committee of the Whole topics included economic development, infrastructure, DEI, and an FFE look-forward.

City Manager Ritsema thanked staff and the City Commission for their time and energy. City Manager Ritsema announced the next City Commission retreat would take place on February 18, 2023.

Mayor Anderson stated he would complete the phrase, "Kalamazoo will be a great place if..." with "...we all work together." Mayor Anderson encouraged Commissioners to give staff feedback and support and to work with community partners.

The meeting adjourned at 2:51 p.m.

Scott A. Borling
City Clerk

Approved by the City Commission on: _____