

Landlord / Tenant Advisory Group Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, October 28, 2009

Meeting was held on October 28, 2009 at 6:30 p.m. in the Village Board Room.
Present: Mayor Larry Hartwig, John Berley of the Village of Addison Community Development, Ron Zaylik of the Village of Addison Community Development, Commander Karen Miller of the Addison Police Department, Clerk Mary Heneghan of the Addison Police Department, 14 landlords, and two tenants.

I. Welcome

Mayor Hartwig welcomed the attendees and thanked them for their participation.

II. Questions / Discussion

The Mayor began the meeting by stating that Addison needs a vision for rental properties, and he asked the group what ideas they had and how they thought the Village could assist them. Listed are the key issues discussed:

- The group agreed that one reasonable goal is to lower the criminal activity in rental properties and for property owners to have a zero tolerance approach to criminal activity by their tenants. Another goal would be to work together with Community Development to improve the inspection process, possibly focusing on curb-side inspections. The property owners agreed that many experienced and dedicated landlords do not want to own property in Addison due to the reputation of the strict and tedious inspection process.
- The Mayor agreed that rental properties should not be at the center of crime, as is the case right now. One goal of the Commission will be to make recommendations for what the Village can do in cooperation with property owners to lower crime. He then asked the group what they would consider reasonable to expect in regard to the exteriors of the buildings. The property owners agreed that curb appeal is a key component – the exteriors of the buildings need to be well maintained. If this is the case, then most likely the interiors will be properly maintained as well. This will also assist in attracting prospective tenants. However, the tenants present believe that curb appeal does not matter and what is important is safety and reducing gangs and gang activity.
- Another goal the property owners wish to achieve is to attract quality tenants to Addison. The property owners recognize that the Village is working to ensure that they, as owners, do their part in this process, even though the inspections are a problem due to the heavy emphasis on minor details. However, the problem lies with the “slumlords” that are not actively involved in maintaining their properties or working to get quality residents into their properties. Commander Miller addressed this point by discussing the Nuisance Abatement ordinance and its role in keeping quality tenants in the rental properties and maintaining a high quality of life. She stressed that the Crime Free Multi-Housing program will take some time to see results, but by everyone working together and communicating with each other, we are heading in the right direction.

- John Berley then discussed how the inspection process works and is funded. The Village now has an incentive program in place, encouraging property owners to take care of their properties. This tiered system allows these owners to only be subjected to inspections every other year, with no fees associated with certain grades. The Village uses two benchmarks for their process: other communities and the cost of running the program. As of right now, the fees charged do not cover the cost of the program. Some landlords stressed that this program is not working at all, and it appears that not all landlords are being held to the same standards and that there are great inconsistencies among the different inspectors. The idea of the inspectors all using the same “punch list” was suggested, as was eliminating the re-inspection fee.
- This topic of discussion continued with the owners stressing that inspectors should focus on major issues and not be as concerned with minor details on the inside of the rental units. The excessive size of the manual is also a concern, to which John Berley responded that this has gradually occurred over time and is based on the International Building Code. Also, the property owners are unable to raise their rents during this difficult economic time, and it is getting extremely difficult to cover expenses and taxes. John Berley stressed that Addison is a great place to invest; however, the entire real estate market is suffering at the current time.
- At this point, Commander Miller discussed the “broken window “ theory, which basically states that problems need to be fixed when they are small; otherwise, one small “break” in a building could turn into a large problem as criminals sense that the building is not taken care of and decide to do additional damage. She explained that we all need to work together and get focused, and simply complaining about these issues will not get us where we need to be.
- The landlords once again discussed the difficult and costly re-inspection process which is keeping qualified investors from purchasing property in Addison. John Berley explained that this is why the inspection process was changed ten years ago, and the Village is continuing to improve the process. For example, this year the inspectors are focusing more on the exteriors of the buildings. He explained that it can sometimes be difficult to encourage landlords to take care of their buildings. The Mayor and tenants present agreed that one course of action would be to involve the tenants more and encourage them to take pride in the building, possibly by making tenants into managers of the buildings.

III. Conclusion

- At this point, the Mayor agreed that we all need to create a unified vision together and asked the group to understand that there will be differences and mistakes made along the way. The next step will be to appoint a Commission to begin working on the issues brought forth at these meetings.
- The Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 9 at 6:30 p.m. in Room 1301B of the Village Hall.
- The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.