



CITY OF BIGGS Planning Staff Report

TO: CITY OF BIGGS CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Scott Friend, AICP – City Planner

MEETING DATE: July 14, 2015; 6:30 p.m.
Biggs City Hall, 3016 Sixth Street, Biggs, CA 95917

SUBJECT: Downtown Code Enforcement / Downtown Code Enforcement Meeting Review

REQUEST

Staff requests that the City Council review this staff report and provide feedback and direction to staff relative to Code Enforcement efforts in the Downtown Area.

DISCUSSION

The City of Biggs held a public workshop meeting on Tuesday, June 23rd for property owners and tenants of property in the City's Downtown area (defined as both sides of B Street between 6th and 7th Streets). The intent of the workshop meeting was to provide a forum whereby City staff and staff from the Butte County Building Division could discuss with attendees the issues confronting the Downtown area, explain the code enforcement process and how the various City Codes and Building Codes apply to structures in the Downtown, and to discuss options for the achievement of abatement of the existing code violations and hazard conditions. Attending the meeting on behalf of the City were Mark Sorensen, Scott Friend and Nicole Fillmore and from the County Building Division were Nancy Springer, Curtis Johnson and Philo Hunt. Both of the members of the City Council's Downtown Area Ad Hoc Committee also participated in the meeting.

Five (5) property owners and tenants of structures in the Downtown area attended the meeting. Four of the five non-agency meeting attendees represented property owners or tenants of structures on the north side of B Street with one property owner representing property/structures on the south side of B Street (Ott).

Staff made a brief presentation outlining the issues and code violations that are present in the area and then engaged the group in a dialogue seeking ways to address and abate the various code violations and issues. Of the persons representing property or structures at the meeting, four of the five appeared to support proceeding with the abatement of violations regardless of the probable outcome of action while one desired the City to "do something" but wasn't in favor of actions resulting in the demolition of structures and expressed a desire to retain the buildings even if they remained in their current condition. All participants seemed to support the retention of character-elements and historical-elements of the buildings having such traits. As expected, the primary points of conversation surrounded safety concerns; the attractive nuisance nature of vacant buildings; the

costs and challenges involved in rehabilitation, demolition, repair or re-construction actions; and, the desire to see a revitalization of the Downtown area.

As part of the conversation, staff queried participants about what they wanted to see in the Downtown area; invited comments or observations about other known successful redevelopment programs; engaged participants in a discussion of the difficulties surrounding code enforcement, structural abatement of building deficiencies; discussed issues related to the undertaking of redevelopment in the absence of redevelopment laws, financing and landowner participation; and, invited participants to help the City find solutions to the issues in the Downtown area. Staff reviewed the process by which code enforcement and building code enforcement efforts are required to proceed and a lengthy discussion was had in regard to costs, probable outcomes and longer-term visions. Based upon the feedback offered by meeting participants and upon a review of comments offered, staff believes that the following items generally represent the areas of agreement and concern relative to the dialogue that occurred at the meeting:

Areas of Agreement:

- The City needs to do something to address the conditions of buildings in the Downtown;
- The current state of disrepair does not present a positive image of the City;
- That abatement will be both costly and difficult;
- That the current state of structures in the area negatively impacts those businesses trying to operate in the Downtown;
- That negative equity conditions probably exist for most structures/properties in the area;
- That the City needs to assist property owners in reinvesting in the Downtown through infrastructure investment, grant acquisition and other assistance mechanisms where possible;
- That there is a desire to retain the historical elements of the Downtown; and,
- That real safety hazards exist due to current conditions.

Areas of Concern:

- There is a lack of foreseeable investment options for revitalization and redevelopment;
- There appears to be a lack of finances suitable to achieve successful revitalization and redevelopment;
- The potential long-term vacancy of abated properties presents a real obstacle to financing and investment options;
- The lack of foreseeable and concrete information relative to costs, procedures, requirements and outcomes presents a barrier to reinvestment; and,
- The aesthetics of an abundance of vacant land in the Downtown could further exacerbate the negative image of the Downtown area.

Upon conclusion of the dialogue, staff asked participants to discuss these issues with other property owners and business in the area and to provide input to the City in regard to programs that could be available or that could be options to assist with this effort.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

N/A.

PUBLIC COMMENT

N/A.

FISCAL IMPACT

Pursuit of Code Enforcement activities in the Downtown Area is anticipated to result in additional costs to the City. However, the extent of those costs is not currently known and is partially dependent on factors outside of the City's control and beyond the ability of staff to foresee. Staff anticipates that costs for this effort could be substantial. Budget for the pursuit of abatement of code enforcement violations is not currently included in the City's approved Fiscal Year budget.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council consider the issue, the feedback gained as part of the City's recent public meeting on the topic, past direction to proceed with code enforcement abatement, and provide direction to staff relative to the desire of the Council to continue to pursue an active Code Enforcement effort in the Downtown Area.

ATTACHMENT(S):

None.