



CITY OF DECATUR ILLINOIS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Council approves at-risk property registration ordinance, support of Garfield Park redesign; reinvests in Small Home Improvement Program

Decatur, IL – Highlights from the February 5, 2024 Decatur City Council meeting include approval of a vacant and foreclosed properties registration ordinance, support of the redesign of Garfield Park, and the allocation of \$400,000 for small home improvement grants.

Vacant & Foreclosed Properties Registration

On Monday night the Decatur City Council spent time discussing – and eventually approved – an ordinance creating a register for at-risk vacant and foreclosed properties in Decatur. Community revitalization is one of the City Council’s top priority goals, and Monday’s action gives the City more legal tools to ensure derelict vacant structures get demolished or rehabilitated faster.

The new ordinance, City Code Chapter 70.2, establishes rules requiring property registration and semi-annual fee collection on certain at-risk vacant properties that are improperly maintained. Vacant properties that are well maintained, with little-to-no code violations, will not need to be registered. City staff will have the authority to determine if a property is “registrable” and if an owner objects, there is an appeal process.

City staff hopes this ordinance will cause derelict and irresponsible owners of vacant structures to move more quickly toward private demolition or rehabilitation of the structure. If the registrable property owner does not pay the fees and/or violates the ordinance in other ways, the City can take legal action, which could lead to a faster foreclosure on the structure.

The ordinance is not about raising revenue. Vacant structures are fire traps for first responders, they can be home to vermin, can be drug houses, and are blight in our neighborhoods. Over 1,500 communities in the US have adopted vacant and foreclosed ordinances in some form. Rantoul, Bloomington, Normal, Champaign, and Urbana have such ordinances.

Along with the ordinance, Council approved an agreement with Hera Property Registry, LLC to establish and manage an online registry. City staff and Hera personnel will work together to administer the registry. For their services, Hera would retain a portion of the fees charged.

Garfield Park re-design, catalyst project

Also approved was support of the Decatur Park District's re-design of Garfield Park. Council agreed to use \$250,000 of Community Development Block Grant Covid-19 (CDBG-CV) funds as a matching grant to reconfigure the existing park into a more user-friendly and updated community space. This is part of a larger catalyst project to revitalize the area from VanDyke to Oakland, south of Grand Ave, and to repurpose the old Garfield school building.

New amenities proposed for the park include a new playground and updated surfacing, new shelters and parking lots, new basketball courts, a new interactive ball wall, and ADA improvements. The City continues to work with the Illinois Housing Development Authority to repurpose the school building into affordable senior living apartments. Plans also include adding mixed-income housing and commercial space to the area.

Small Home Improvement Program

City Council continued its investment in community revitalization by approving \$400,000 for the Small Home Improvement Program (SHIP). This program, in partnership with the Northeast Community Fund (NECF), assists owner-occupied residents with small home repairs as a proactive measure on aging homes.

NECF provided 17 grants in 2023 for repairs such as replacement of roofs, doors, windows, HVAC, hot water tanks, as well as ADA accessibility improvements. NECF received more than 800 applications for assistance in 2023 and they will continue using that applicant pool when administering the new round of funding. Learn more: <https://decaturil.gov/small-home-improvement-program/>

In other business...

Two bridges in Decatur are getting a major facelift. Council approved reconstruction of Grove Road bridge over Sand Creek and the repair of West Mound Road bridge over Stevens Creek. The Grove Road bridge project is being funded with Rebuild Illinois Motor Fuel Taxes, while state Motor Fuel Taxes will fund the West Mound Road bridge project.

And finally, Council approved a contract with an engineering firm to provide a design study for a new downtown parking deck. The parking structure would be attached to the Barnes-Citizen building to support new development planned and currently under construction in the 165,000-square-foot space. The City will provide more details about this project in the near future.

More information about these topics can be found in the City Council Agenda packet, downloadable/viewable here: www.decaturil.gov/mayor-and-council/council-meetings/