

**City of Moorhead  
Committee of the Whole  
Meeting Minutes  
April 18, 2011 at 5:30 PM  
City Hall Council Chambers**

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a regular meeting of the Committee of the Whole was held in the City Hall Council Chambers, on April 18, 2011, at 5:30 PM.

**Roll call of the members was made as follows:**

1st Ward Council Member:	Luther Stueland	Present
1st Ward Council Member:	Nancy Otto	Present
2nd Ward Council Member:	Diane Wray Williams	Present
2nd Ward Council Member:	Mark Altenburg	Present
3rd Ward Council Member:	Dan Hunt	Present
3rd Ward Council Member:	Brenda Elmer	Present
4th Ward Council Member:	Mark Hintermeyer	Present
4th Ward Council Member:	Greg Lemke	Present
Mayor:	Mark Voxland	Present

**Committee of the Whole Meeting**

1. [Neighborhood Services Overview](#)

- A. Rental Registration Program
- B. Vacant Building Designation Fees
- C. Code Enforcement Program

Minutes: Lisa Vatnsdal, Neighborhood Services Manager, provided a brief overview of Neighborhood Services, including the Rental Registration Program, vacant building designation fees, and the Code Enforcement Program:

- Neighborhood Services programming is intended to ensure that rental units are maintained properly for the health and safety of renters as well as aesthetics and pride in neighborhoods.
- Education comprises a large part of staff work and is accomplished through City newsletters, website, and calendar; local media; public presentations; and direct communication with landlords and tenants.
- Code enforcement activities are accomplished through administrative penalties and fines and include an appeal process.
- Rental registration works in partnership with the Police Department, particularly the Community Policing program.
- The focus of Neighborhood Services is mainly on property conditions not behavior issues.
- Rental registration and inspection has been in place for about 30 years. Currently, there is one code enforcement technician in conjunction with Building Codes and Engineering personnel who inspect almost 6,000 rental units in the City each year.
- Fees enable the program to be self-funded. Recently fees have been

reduced slightly.

- There is a difference between vacant buildings and dangerous buildings. Vacant buildings must be registered if they are condemned, unoccupied, or if there are code violations or nuisance problems. A registration fee is charged to cover the costs of monitoring such buildings. Foreclosed homes do not fall under this requirement as long as the home is secured and there are no nuisance issues. There is a state procedure to follow in dealing with dangerous buildings.
- The City maintains a neutral position with regard to tenants and landlords.
- City Code allows up to four unrelated individuals in a rental property. This is intended to address parking issues, traffic issues, and neighborhood integrity.
- Costs of the rental registration program are often passed on to renters who usually are least able to absorb them. This may deter some people from renting in Moorhead.
- In 2005, the City Council adopted the Rental Registration Program as a compromise between housing needs and neighborhood needs. Before the program, there were up to ten people living in an apartment. The Council and the community felt four unrelated people in an apartment were an acceptable compromise.
- If the City would like students to live in Moorhead, the City needs to identify what type of rental units are needed and where they should be located.
- Certified self-inspections allow landlords who have received good inspections in the past to fill out an inspection checklist themselves and return it to the City. The property is still inspected by City officials at least every other year.
- Moorhead Public Service notifies Neighborhood Services of incidents where tenants face eviction for unpaid utilities which are the responsibility of the landlord. Tenants are referred to other community services for assistance.
- A "Greyfields" program may be able to assist with issues of vacant buildings.
- Neighborhood Services attempts to identify and correct any loopholes in the rental registration program, including false contracts for deeds to avoid rental registration.
- Issues of hoarding are referred by the City to Social Services.

The Mayor and Council noted the following:

- Concern was noted regarding absentee landlords who do not have a local property manager.
- Concern was raised regarding no background check requirement for landlords.
- Residents indicate a sense of loss in neighborhoods near campus areas where rental units have significantly increased. It was suggested that the City consider rezoning around college areas to

slow the flow of single-family homes being converted into rental units.

- It was suggested that information be made available to the public on less desirable landlords in order to protect renters.
- Concern was noted regarding the possibility of “labeling” properties.
- An issue of vacant commercial buildings was raised. Investors may not consider a business in Moorhead if the rules are too strict and penalties and fees are too high.
- Concern was noted regarding vacant buildings in the community even though there may not be any code violations and the property is being maintained.

Vatnsdal will provide a report to the Mayor and Council on whether rental registration fees are commensurate to services if Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds are cut and what vehicles are allowed to sit in front yard driveways.

2. [City Manager Reports](#)

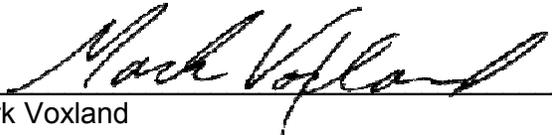
A. Flood 2011 Update

Minutes: Redlinger provided the Council with two updates:

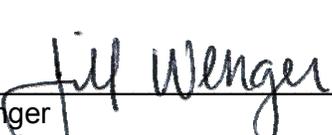
- FEMA damage teams will arrive in Moorhead soon. The City has \$2.3 million in flood expenses now; analysis of those expenses will be provided to the Council.
- Quotes for sandbag dike and clay levee removal will be provided at the April 25 City Council meeting. It is projected to take 7-10 days to remove levees and dikes.

It was reported that the river level is below 35 feet at this time. It will take a significant amount of time to lower flood stage due to snowmelt and rain, but the level is not expected to rise.

APPROVED BY:

  
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Mark Voxland  
Mayor

ATTEST:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jill Wenger  
City Clerk

The proceedings of this meeting are digitally recorded and are available for public review.

*Respectfully submitted by:*  
*Becky Jahnke, Deputy City Clerk*