

Austin City Council takes title to three dilapidated houses

Written by Marty Randall

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Three houses in dilapidated condition are now owned by the City of Austin.

Austin Mayor Doug Campbell told members of the City Council that he planned to record the city's titles to those properties deeds in the very near future during the Council's meeting on February 23.

The action is a continuation of the Council's policy to obtain title to properties determined to be in extremely poor condition. In the past, the city has torn down such homes and then placed the cleared property for sale to give others the chance to build nice houses in the community. Any profit realized from the sale of such properties is placed in a special fund used to buy dilapidated homes. Other monies in that fund come from fines placed against people who do not keep their properties clean and grass trimmed.

Properties in this round included Lots 18 and 19 in the Allendale Addition and homes on Factory Drive and Wade Street.

A crackdown on people who have been using large bins to hold trash bags on their properties has been successful, the Mayor reported that evening. Such bins are a violation of the city's garbage ordinance. Though the Mayor and Council have been lenient in the past, property owners with such bins have recently been notified of the ordinance violation and asked to removed their bins, some of which appeared to be homemade.

On a recommendation of the Austin Board of Works and Public Safety and the Mayor, the Council voted to increase the contracted amount that the Jennings Township Volunteer Fire Department is due for 2010 from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

That vote came with the caveat that the fire department may not be paid that amount in 2011. The Council was able to meet the \$5,000 increase because the funds were available from the city's Rainy Day Fund. "We just can't promise this amount will be here next year," stressed Mayor Campbell.

In other business, the Mayor informed the Council that a review of the wording on a fencing ordinance is continuing. A moratorium on new fencing has been in place since January in the community and is scheduled to expire in April.

The Council also discussed a sales building placed on commercial property near the Interstate 65 interchange. The building is not permanently anchored but rather is on skids. It also cannot be hooked to the city's sewer system because of its size, which is 240 square feet. The owner of the building told Mayor Campbell that he was selling storage buildings of various sizes and scooters on the site off State Road 256.

The city's attorney was asked to research the matter to determine if the business is violating the zoning ordinance.

Council member Lonnie Noble reported to fellow members that two women who had been charged with prostitution had been placed on probation and will pay no fines or fees to the local court. He expressed his disappointment that the women's cases were handled in this manner. "The only good thing to come out of this is that we got two convictions. If they are caught again, the charge will be a Class B felony," Noble stated. Noble is employed by the Austin Police Department as its detective and was the charging officer on both cases.

Mayor Campbell said in his opinion, "Being indigent doesn't excuse what these women did. Our police worked hard to come up with good cases against each of them."

A resident, Don Taylor, said Scott County was recently ranked last of all Indiana counties in health concerns. "We're at the bottom of the barrel!" he declared, which caused Council president Roger Hawkins to comment, "All the more reason we must continue to get people to clean up their properties. That's an unhealthy habit."

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The order for decorative lighting for the city's downtown area is nearly complete and banners have been ordered. The Mayor said he will soon be meeting with Duke Energy and the company which will install them.

The Council was also presented with information on a computerized system to handle all records and from a firm that keeps track of fixed assets.

A resolution was accepted and passed by the Council to provide a local match of \$3,400 for the city's storm water drainage study. The resolution confirmed the local match and allowed the Mayor to sign contracts for the study.