

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

After a lengthy discussion at the Nov. 19 meeting, the Imperial city council will likely vote on an agreement Monday that would donate seven lots in the city's Cornerstone property for a rental housing project.

Members of the Imperial Citizens Advisory Committee forwarded the council their recommendation on a 3-0 vote to donate the lots to Dana Point Development Corporation.

If all of the company's financing and plans proceed, 10 rental units would be built for low-income residents (earning at or below 60 percent of median income). Units will be either homes or duplexes, according to the discussion.

At last week's meeting, the council directed City Attorney Josh Wendell to draw up an agreement that would sell the seven lots for \$1 for the project. As part of that, it will state that if no housing project develops, the lots will revert back to the city.

Matt Thomas, representing Dana Point, attended the Citizens Advisory Committee's Nov. 15 meeting, when the project was outlined.

He indicated then that the margin on these types of projects is very tight and when adding land acquisition costs, they cannot cash flow.

So, to make it work in Imperial, it would require the land be transferred to the project at no cost.

The firm also plans to seek HOME grant funds from the Nebraska Dept. of Economic Development to provide capital for the project.

Imperial's recent designation as a Certified Economic Development Community will provide additional "points" in that grant application, according to City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland.

In addition, the firm would be able to access Imperial's utility tap fee waiver program available for new construction projects and use tax increment financing (TIF) to help with infrastructure costs after the city completes the General Redevelopment Plan for Cornerstone.

Leyland said the city has been in contact with several developers in recent years to deal with the Imperial housing shortage.

"He's the only one who has given us a serious look," she said. "This is a golden opportunity for us."

The seven Cornerstone lots being considered for the project include Lots 12-18 located on the north side of 2nd Street. If the project proceeds, they would have to be replatted to accommodate 10 housing units, Leyland said.

Construction could begin in the spring if the financing all falls into place.

Some of the council members asked about use of local contractors and suppliers on the project.

While it was uncertain on how much labor and supplies would be brought in, council member Chad Yaw said it wouldn't hurt to coax the company to use local businesses.

Regarding the company's use of the tap fee waiver program, Jim Hayes said he would not be happy if Dana Point used all of the funds in that program for his project.

Dana Point, a California-based company, has been working in Nebraska for 13 years on housing projects.

The Dec. 3 meeting will start at 6 p.m. in the council chambers.

Other agenda items

Also on Monday's agenda will be a public hearing for the General Redevelopment Plan at Cornerstone, approval of the slate of IVFD officers and closing the city offices on Christmas Eve.

The new council members, Dan Thompson and J.D. Reeder, will also be sworn in and take their seats at the Dec. 3 meeting, replacing Doug Gaswick and Sue Moore.

Other council business

- Ordinances lowering the speed, and adding a stop sign and crosswalk in the Capitol Mobile Home Court area west of Chase County Schools will be reconsidered based on discussion last week. Police Sgt. Ryan Wisnieski, adding that Police Chief Rob Browning concurred, asked the council to return the issue to the Planning Commission, which had forwarded recommendation to make those changes on Shorthorn St. and East 10th and 11th Sts. Wisnieski said he visited with school administration and a resident of the court, who had said they knew of no problems with student safety. The request for the slower speed, stop sign and crosswalk came from managers of the court. The Planning Commission will take another look at the requests. The request from the school for an additional handicapped parking space will proceed.

- A rate structure for impounded vehicles from within the city was discussed and will be included in a new resolution that will have all of the fees for city services listed. The issue came up during reviews for nuisance code violations by West Central Nebraska Development District, which wanted a rate structure to give to the property owner if an unlicensed vehicle is to be removed. The proposal will charge \$25 per day for storage plus the towing fee. In order to retake possession of the vehicle, a title of ownership will be required. All payments will have to be made in cash. The fee structure will be part of a resolution that will be reviewed in January.

- Annual audit of the city's senior services was reviewed with Steve Placke of Shonsey & Associates of Grand Island. One topic discussed at length was the child care program, which showed a big loss during the past fiscal year. Placke said he has not seen one child care facility that is part of a nursing home operation make money or even break even, but Imperial's has a bigger loss than he sees in most. However, he said it's difficult to put a price on the "intangibles," that include providing a needed service and the "generational impact" of having youngsters interacting with senior citizens. Placke pointed out that the big chunk of expense is payroll-related and made some suggestions such as charging parents when their children don't arrive when they are planned on. During the past fiscal year, the child care operation showed expenses of \$165,173 and revenues of \$85,196. One area that will help on the revenue side, according to Administrator Sandra Palmer, will be charging for preschool time when youths there for daycare also participate in those preschool activities. Leyland also noted the child care center was not at full capacity a good part of the past year.

- A total of \$1,649.02 in uncollectable city utility accounts will be written off, based on a 4-0 council vote. Ten different former customers are on the write-off list.

