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Historic Home Stabilization Program Follow Up (B)

The mission of the proposed Historic Home Stabilization Program is to preserve the original character-defining architectural elements of the neighborhoods and prevent the demolition of single-family homes. This program will be part of a suite of five housing programs the GCRA will implement with the goal of attainable housing by maintaining the population and culture of neighborhoods, as described in the GCRA 10 Year Reinvestment Plan.

The proposed guidelines of the forthcoming Historic Home Stabilization Program was presented to the GCRA Advisory Board on July 20, 2021 (Legistar #201144). During this meeting the Advisory Board made the following motion: “Staff bring the program back next month with a number of homes that have been identified as built before 1978 that would qualify for this program.” Other Advisory Board comments included a request that data and information be presented about the criteria required for a structure to be considered “contributing” to a historic district. The Board also requested that staff look into options for implementing the program district wide, instead of just in City designated historic districts.

Staff found that there 1,653 homes in the GCRA district that were built before the year 1978. Fifth Avenue and Pleasant Street saw the majority of housing development between the Post-Civil War-era through the 1940’s. Existing homes in Porters Quarters and Springhill neighborhoods were primarily built between the 1920’s through 1950’s. The Greater Duval area and North Lincoln Estates are defined by mid-century homes built from the 1940’s through 1970’s.

Since 2011 the City of Gainesville Office of Code Enforcement has declared 58 buildings within the GCRA District to be dangerous. As of July 2021, the district still contains 11 dangerous buildings. A building is declared to be dangerous when it is unsafe; attributes include leaning interior walls, floors or roof are not able to hold weight, fire damage, dilapidation, and any health or safety hazard.

These buildings are at risk of eventually being possessed by the City or sold by a homeowner to an investor to

be demolished. The City of Gainesville Comprehensive Plan Historic Preservation Element notes that many houses which contribute to local history have been demolished due to neglect in the Fifth Avenue, Pleasant Street, Porters Quarters, and Springhill neighborhoods.

There are existing local programs that offer assistance to rehabilitate Gainesville homes, including programs offered by the City of Gainesville Housing and Community Development Department. However, there is a need for a local program that focuses on preventing “demolition by neglect,” provides assistance for middle income earners, in addition to low income, and rehabilitate vacant and non-homesteaded homes which will be inhabited or sold for homeownership. The proposed Program is designed to complement existing programs and address the needs outlined above.

Since the July GCRA Advisory Board meeting GCRA staff have updated the program guidelines to respond to recommendations made at that meeting. The program would offer assistance according to a tiered system based on income level and homestead status (vacant and non-homesteaded homes which will be inhabited or sold for homeownership). Proposed eligible areas of the program would be Fifth Avenue, Porters Quarters, Pleasant Street, Springhill, and Sugarhill neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were selected for the program because they face the most redevelopment pressures and threat to their historic homes.

The Historic Home Stabilization Program has currently allocated an FY22 budget not to exceed amount of \$77,000 budgeted for its pilot year in the GCRA Fund 1132 “Residential Improvement Programs” account.

GCRA Director to GCRA Advisory Board: Hear update on Program from Staff and make recommendations regarding next steps.