

DWELLING PLACE OF GRAND RAPIDS  
FINANCE COMMITTEE  
August 28, 2019  
*Unapproved Minutes*

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** David Byers, Angela Sanborn, Holly Jacoby, Sadie Erickson

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Michael McDaniels, Gil Segovia

**STAFF PRESENT:** Karen Monroe, Steve Recker, Scott Page, Grace Thuo, Jessica Johnson, Brandon Watson, Rebecca Long, Jessica Beeby, Liz Mui, Chris Bennett, Kim Cross, Dennis Sturtevant

The meeting was convened at 12:03 pm by David Byers.

**APPROVAL OF JULY MINUTES** **Minutes of the Finance Committee meeting of July 31, 2019 were approved by motion of Ms. Jacoby, supported by Ms. Erickson and carried unanimously.**

**REVIEW OF 2ND QUARTER FINANCIAL STATEMENTS** Mr. Recker reviewed the updated financial ratios from Neighborworks. A negative trend was noted, due to the recent construction activity, including an increase in current liabilities and a slight decrease in cash. In the next few months, a projected \$4-5 million will be out from development projects.

Ms. Jacoby requested a cash flow construction budget to better understand the projected risks. Mr. Recker will share his spreadsheet.

Next, Mr. Recker reviewed the following documents:

- Financial Dashboard
- Balance Sheet
- Dwelling Place Income Statement
- Properties and Related Entities

**ANNOUNCEMENTS/ UPDATES** Mr. Sturtevant shared about “Our Westside Story” Dwelling Place Fundraiser taking place on Wednesday, September 25, 2019, at the Bissell Tree House at John Ball Zoo. The Westside Story theme is our way of celebrating our housing and community partnerships in six projects located on Grand Rapids West Side. Ms. Mui forwarded the sponsorship information and materials to the Finance Committee.

**PROPOSED AGENDA AND NEXT MEETING DATE** The next Finance Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 25, 2019 at 12:00 pm.

**ADJOURNMENT** The Finance Committee meeting was adjourned at 1:01 pm by Mr. Sturtevant.



# Nonprofits working on homelessness turn attention to LGBTQ youths

BY JANE C. SIMONS

Saturday, September 14, 2019 07:30am

GRAND RAPIDS — A house on Union Avenue SE may soon become part of the solution to providing safe and stable housing to the city's growing population of homeless youths.

Nonprofit developer **Inner City Christian Federation** is partnering with fellow nonprofits **3:11 Youth Housing** and **Grand Rapids HQ** to provide housing support services to homeless young people, with a goal of turning the Union Avenue property into affordable housing for young adults who identify as LGBTQ. The program would provide housing for the young adults and also match them with a mentor family living in an adjacent unit, according to public documents about the project.

The city initially acquired the property as a tax foreclosure and sold it to ICCF in 2018 to turn it into affordable rentals, according to Kara Wood, managing director of economic development services for the city.

ICCF and its partners on Tuesday got the go-ahead from the city's Economic Development Project Team to present the plans to Grand Rapids City Commission. The full commission must approve the plans since the mentor families may not meet the Area Median Income requirements for affordable housing, which is \$32,220 for a one-person household and \$36,780 for a two-person household, Wood said.

"We know the youth being served will be below the 60 percent AMI requirement, but the families may not, so we were asking the city commission to consider this option as an alternative," Wood said.

While the partners declined to talk in detail about the LGBTQ housing project as it goes through the approval process, they say the need for such a project is great.

Grand Rapids HQ in 2014 opened West Michigan's first and only drop-in center for runaway and homeless youths, according to a report from May in *Revue West Michigan*. The organization has served 1,200 youths who have come through its doors in search of a hot meal, internet access or to watch TV, Executive Director and co-founder Shandra Steininger said in the report. HQ now has more than 200 visits per week.

While the number of homeless young people in Kent County is difficult to quantify, the need for housing is there and growing, said Lauren VanKeulen, co-executive director of 3:11 Youth Housing, citing the occupancy rates at the homes that she and her husband, Jonathan VanKeulen, operate through the nonprofit.

"We know that at least 80 youth per night in Kent County are experiencing homelessness," she said. "It's hard to get an accurate picture. We're working on getting better data."

The VanKeulens founded 3:11 Youth Housing in 2012 after members of a youth group they were leading at their former church told them about the homelessness issues many of the area's young people face.

“There was a growing need from youth experiencing homelessness for a variety of reasons who were between the ages of 18-24. At the time, there were only two beds in Kent County for this age range,” VanKeulen said. “We started very small and did a lot of research. We did focus groups here and asked what model would work.”

The couple started with one house on the southwest side of Grand Rapids and now operates eight properties.

“We actually got our first property from the Kent County Land Bank for \$10,000 and put \$100,000 into it,” VanKeulen said. “Three houses were donated and we've gotten good deals on the others from people who want to support what we're doing.”

Jonathan VanKeulen, who has been in commercial and residential construction for 15 years, performs all the renovations on the properties.

## **Offering help**

The funding for 3:11 Youth Housing comes from individuals, local foundations, and the rent paid by young people living in the homes. VanKeulen said a lot of local foundations are interested in the work they do because of their mission to serve any young person and to create safe spaces for them no matter how they identify.

“Our faith guides our work, but we don't mandate that the youth we serve have any kind of faith at all. They don't have to identify as Christian,” she said.

Having this type of housing support option is particularly significant for youth who identify as LGBTQ, said Kayla Maroney, a counselor with Grand Rapids-based **Advanced Counseling and Therapy Services LLC**, which specializes in the LGBTQ population.

“It's so important that we have specific resources geared toward the LGBTQ+ community,” Maroney said. “They may face discrimination related to their gender identity from other shelters and resource services. It's important for them to hear that this part of themselves is not going to determine whether or not an organization will give them a bed.”

VanKeulen said many homeless youths have been hurt because of various churches' stances on the LGBTQ community.

“A lot of homeless organizations previously mandated a faith requirement. To get services, they have to listen to a sermon,” she said. “We saw a lot of hurt and pain that the church had caused. We wanted to create a space where young people could bring themselves.”

In addition to the housing services 3:11 makes available to all youth, the mentor component also is important, Maroney said. Giving LGBTQ youths access to mentor families can help to lessen the negative home environments that they left behind.

“This also gives them access to healthy role models, and being closely exposed to healthy role models helps them to validate their decisions and choices,” Maroney said. “This tells them that even though their family may have withdrawn resources, you are a valued human being and we are going to acknowledge who you are.”

## **Seeking stability**

The 3:11 properties each are occupied by three to four youths with a house mentor on each site in a separate area. Tenants pay \$250 monthly for rent and utilities, with \$50 of that total set aside for them to put toward the first month’s rent and the security deposit when they are financially able to move out and get their own apartments.

VanKeulen said some 3:11 tenants have had \$1,000 to use as a result of this savings program.

“Many young people when they move in don’t have jobs, and up to the first three months, they are able to stay for free,” VanKeulen said. “We work with them to get employment and we partner with other organizations to get them the skills they need to be employed. For some, this could be trade school, getting their GED or attending classes at Grand Rapids Community College.

“We offer reduced rent while they build the skills they need. We really do work on moving them from minimum wage to a living wage.”

The typical stay for 3:11 tenants is about a year and a half. Since the program launched, it has served 44 youths, VanKeulen said, noting that by the end of this year it will be able to serve 24 youths at a time. She said about 90 percent of the youths it served have moved into their own safe and stable housing or have moved back with their families.

“In my field, we support many people who are processing changes,” VanKeulen said. “There is a need for more education and understanding. Developing a closer and knowing relationship with one’s child can be a beautiful thing.”

LGBTQ youths who come from families who won’t embrace their choices often face persistent challenges with homelessness, sources told *MiBiz* for this report. As well, if the youths are constantly moving, they often are unable to develop close, long-term relationships.

“If they’re always moving or move to different towns to get resources, they’re always going to be starting and stopping relationships,” Maroney said. “Having that interaction with adults who want to talk with them gives them the ability to develop social skills and long-term relationships.”