Neighborhood Revitalization Town Hall Recap
City Hall, Ponca City
May 6, 2025

On a warm evening in May, over 60 community members gathered at City Hall for a Neighborhood Revitalization Town Hall, hosted by Mayor Kelsey Wagner and Commissioner Stephanie Austion. The goal was to listen, learn, and start building a path toward improving quality of life in Ponca City's historic neighborhoods.

What We Love About Our Neighborhoods:

Residents expressed deep pride in the character and charm of their neighborhoods. Common themes included:

- **Walkability & Location**: Many neighborhoods are within walking distance of schools, parks, downtown, and the library.
- **Unique Architecture & Trees**: The mature trees, historical homes, and distinct styles give each area a unique personality.
- **Neighborly Feel**: People appreciate knowing their neighbors and want to return to a time when neighbors helped each other out.
- **Quiet Streets & Active Yards**: Residents enjoy the peacefulness of their neighborhoods and seeing others maintaining their homes.
- **City Services Appreciation**: Several praised the friendliness of sanitation workers, visible police patrols, and city communications.

Concerns & Opportunities for Improvement:

While there was a lot of appreciation, residents were candid about areas that need attention.

Housing Challenges:

- **Vacant & Dilapidated Homes**: Many properties have sat empty for decades. Some are maintained, others attract squatters or fall into disrepair.
- **Lack of Housing for Young Professionals**: Many shared that it's hard to find affordable, quality housing for new employees or young families.
- **Airbnb Impact**: Acknowledged as great for tourism but problematic for long-term housing supply.
- **Rental Property Oversight**: Some landlords own dozens of properties but fail to reinvest in them.

Infrastructure & Safety:

- **Damaged Sidewalks & Narrow Streets**: These pose safety issues, especially where on-street parking restricts access.
- **Street Lighting**: Some neighborhoods are too dark at night, deterring walking and increasing safety concerns.

- **Noise**: Complaints about loud vehicles and motorized bicycles disrupting quiet neighborhoods.
- **Overgrown Trees & Ditches**: Need for more consistent maintenance of public right-of-ways.

Code Enforcement:

- **Equitable Enforcement**: Residents want consistent application of codes citywide, not just in certain neighborhoods.
- **Harsh First Contact**: Current red-letter notices feel aggressive; residents want a chance to fix things before penalties.
- **Education**: Many new residents are unaware of rules about parking on grass, leaving bulky trash at the curb, or property upkeep.

Ideas for Revitalization:

The room was full of creative ideas and hopeful energy. Key suggestions included:

- **Neighborhood Identity**: Create maps and signage to help neighborhoods embrace names like "Young Heights" or "Sullins Addition," fostering pride and connection.
- **Tool Libraries**: Share lawn equipment and tools between neighbors instead of everyone buying their own.
- **Neighborhood Captains**: Volunteer liaisons to communicate with the city and organize local improvements.
- **Mini-Grants**: Provide $500–$2,000 grants for landscaping, minor repairs, or painting to boost curb appeal.
- **Neighborhood Clean-Up Days**: Similar to the city's Great Day of Service, but localized to specific blocks or areas.
- **Block Parties & Watch Groups**: Bring back community events and strengthen local networks.

Program & Policy Suggestions:

- **Rehabilitation Incentives**: Create a path for people who buy blighted homes to access funding or have existing fines waived if they're improving the property.
- **Youth Engagement**: Partner with schools, clubs, and church groups to involve teens in beautification efforts.
- **Vacant Property Registry**: Track empty homes and make it easier to intervene or incentivize reuse.
- **Stronger Communication with Landlords**: Ensure notices reach property owners directly, not just tenants.

Big Picture Reflections:

Several residents urged the city to look at root causes — not just symptoms — of neighborhood decline, such as:

- Poverty
- Mental health and substance abuse
- Lack of affordable housing

- Transportation limitations

Mayor Wagner acknowledged the complexity of these challenges and emphasized that this meeting was just the beginning. She committed to taking all the feedback, compiling the notes, and identifying short- and long-term action steps. That may include future meetings, neighborhood meetups, or one-on-one calls to continue the conversation and drive solutions forward.

Final Thoughts:

“Half the battle is just showing up,” Mayor Wagner said in closing. “A lot of people think that it’s the “City’s” job to fix everything,” Mayor Wagner said looking towards the citizens, “But you ARE the city. It’s going to take all of us working together to find solutions.”

Thank you to everyone who came, shared, listened, and offered ideas. The heart of Ponca City is in its neighborhoods — and together, we’ll keep making them better.