

**Holyoke Redevelopment Authority
Meeting Minutes - August 26, 2020
Virtual Meeting via Zoom - Meeting ID: 842 3160 3719**

Members Present:

John Whelihan, Chairperson
Gladys Lebrón-Martinez, Vice Chairperson
Thomas Creed, Treasurer
Carl Eger, Jr., Member

Staff Present:

Marcos Marrero, Executive Director
John Dyjach, Assistant Director
Benjamin Murphy, Development Specialist

Others Present: Sarah Meier-Zimbler and Matthew Mainville (Holyoke Housing Authority), Stephen Huntley and Alexander Jansen (Valley Opportunity Council), Edward Owen (owner, 120 Front St.), Michael Styckiewicz (Hidden Tradition Distilling, Co., 120 Front St.)

1. **Call to order:** John Whelihan called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. and stated that the meeting was being held virtually per the Governor's March 12th executive order and being recorded via a zoom video conference. A roll call followed:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Yes</u>
Thomas Creed	X
Carl Eger, Jr.	X
Gladys Lebrón-Martinez	X
John Whelihan	X

2. **HRA Board Business**

- a. **Meeting Minutes of June 4 and August 11, 2020:** A motion was made by Carl Eger and seconded by Gladys Lebrón-Martinez to approve the minutes of the June 4 and August 11, 2020 meetings. A roll call followed:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Yes</u>
Thomas Creed	X
Carl Eger, Jr.	X
Gladys Lebrón-Martinez	X
John Whelihan	X

- b. **Financial Report:** John Dyjach reviewed the August financial report and said that the HRA funds remained steady. He noted that the \$10,000 payment for the Center City Liquor License is not being reflected as available funds pending State issuance of the license. Mr. Dyjach said the payments on the Jackson Canal loan are paid on schedule and that HEDIC's bi-annual disbursement was made in June. He added that there was also a \$500 payment received from Valley Opportunity Council as an additional deposit for the 123 Pine St. project.

3. **Project/ Property Updates**

- a. **South Holyoke Homes:** Matthew Mainville said that Phase I of South Holyoke Homes received approvals from the Planning Board and the Stormwater Authority. He said funding

Holyoke Redevelopment Authority Meeting

August 26, 2020

Page 1

applications are in with the Federal Home Loan Bank, the AHP Program as well as the Community Scale Housing fund. Mr. Mainville said they were excited that architects from MassHousing did a site tour of the Phase I project. He is hopeful funding will be awarded this Fall and that construction can then move forward. Sarah Meier-Zimmler added that the HHA is also actively working on Phase II. Thomas Creed asked if there was any notable feedback from the Planning Board or progress updates on the MassWorks infrastructure work. Matthew Mainville said he thought the Planning Board feedback was overall very supportive. He said the MassWorks project came in under budget and moving along well with a lot of credit to the City Engineer. John Whelihan said he thought the Planning Board had good questions on landscaping and parking. John Dyjach noted that staff is working on the property transfer and is resolving some deed issues.

- b. 123 Pine Street - Option Agreement Extension:** John Dyjach gave a project overview and said that Valley Opportunity Council recently notified staff of the intent to extend the option agreement for the project. He introduced Stephen Huntley to provide an update. Mr. Huntley said that their first application for funding through MassHousing's One Stop program was unsuccessful but they are preparing to resubmit and are optimistic they can satisfy the funding criteria. He mentioned that several consultants are working on this project and said that Alex Jansen, VOC's project manager is here to answer any specific questions. Thomas Creed asked about the timing for the second application. Stephen Huntley explained that it could be by the end of the year but regardless of when, VOC is prepared to submit. Gladys Lebrón-Martinez asked about the status of the Community Garden move. Ben Murphy said that progress has been made to move the garden but it is not complete. He added that through VOC and with design collaboration with Nuestras Raices, a fence was recently erected around the garden property. John Whelihan asked about the status of the condition of the roof. Alex Jansen said that overall the building needs a lot of work and described some of the work done to prevent damage. He said this is a work in progress but that eventually the roof and all systems will need to be replaced. Thomas Creed asked if the building is secured and not deteriorating further. Alex Jansen replied that it is and getting regular attention.
- c. Canal Row:** John Dyjach said that staff is working with the developers to draft a disposition agreement which will be reviewed during the executive meeting.
- 4. Urban Renewal Plan Amendment - Update and Preparations for Public Hearing:** John Dyjach started by recapping the Planning Board's review of the plan amendment so that it is consistent with overall plans for the area. He expects their determination soon. Mr. Dyjach then explained the protocol for the upcoming Development and Government Relations public hearing on the matter. He referred the Board to the presentation drafted for the public hearing and said that it has a few additions but is very similar to the presentation made to at the Planning Board meeting. Thomas Creed asked about the process at the DGR meeting and the role of the HRA. Marcos Marrero said his expectation is that staff will make the presentation and then city councilors and the public will have comments and questions. John Dyjach added that this is the Council's meeting and that an HRA is required to also post a

meeting notice if a quorum is present. Marcos Marrero explained that the presentation will also include information on projects executed since the inception of the URP.

Chairperson Whelihan then asked if there are any further comments and if anyone from the public has any comments or questions in regard to this process. Edward Owen of 120 Front St. and Mike Styckiewicz also of 120 Front St. introduced themselves. Mr. Owen said he would like to know why his property was put on the list again. Marcos Marrero explained that when the plan was originating back in 2012 the property at 120 Front was included in the first draft of the plan. He said the property was removed in large part due to the owner's concerns of being included in the plan. He said that another consideration back then and as it is now is that there is no immediate action for acquisition. Mr. Marrero then said we are now looking at properties that can be advanced in the years ahead and talked about the past industrial uses and how the area is transitioning with the Lyman Terrace reconstruction, infrastructure work and improvements at nearby properties. He mentioned the intent to promote downtown business uses in this corridor and that the long vacant Die Cut Card building at the corner of Front and Dwight Streets is under development. He said that that 120 Front Street appeared to be an outlier being underutilized for storage and waste stream recycling. He said the area is being redone and there is a potential for future development at this property. He concluded by explaining that it is not the ethos of the HRA to achieve goals by acquiring property by eminent domain. He said the urban renewal plan is a very clear indicator of where the public wants improvements. He understands that a property owner would have concerns but this is not an offer to buy or a threat of eminent domain but does imbue the Redevelopment Authority with this power which is no different than the City having eminent domain authority for a public purpose. Edward Owen said that since 2012 he has put over \$35,000 of his own money into this building without any state grant, community development grant, or help from the HRA or anyone. He said he's the one that has taken care of the property for over 15 years and now he's being told that it's no big deal to be put on this list but he thinks it's a complete insult. Mr. Owen said to go look at his building and look at other buildings that are falling apart. He said he is doing everything he can to take care of his building and he will do whatever he needs to do to save his building. Marcos Marrero said that he honor's Mr. Owen's feelings and is sorry that he feels insulted, it is not the intent. He said to clarify, having a property in the plan is not a reflection of dereliction. The building, being of industrial heritage, is an old industrial building that does not appear to be occupied to its potential and does not have the type of uses established by zoning and the Center City Vision Plan. Looking to the future, in the context of other area improvements, those are the things the public sector aspires. Being in the plan also can be a benefit to the property owner as it can potentially attract other developers to invest. This does not automatically imply that the Redevelopment Authority is going to buy a property. It is first and foremost a declaration of intention and policy on the direction of development in the City. Mr. Owen said that after what just happened with the railroad, if you put my property on the list, it is going to be taken. Mr. Owen said his building is almost completely rented and it has been that way for the last fifteen years and that he pays his taxes to the City. He added that he has a company that makes hand sanitizers and distributes them to the Police and Fire Departments. Mike

Styckiewicz then spoke saying his company has over the last year started a distilling business at Ed's building and is expanding to a larger space in the building. Mr. Styckiewicz said he believes his business is adding to economic development in the area and that he has concerns about Ed Owen's losing the business. Marcos Marrero replied that this not an acquisition of the property but, if there ever was an interest to acquire through eminent domain, there are rigorous requirements of the public entity and the process is overseen by the state with requirements of proper compensation to the owner and there would likely also be relocation resources for tenants as well. He added that this a long term plan and gave the example the Parsons Paper project. Edward Owen said if that is the case, why his property isn't just removed from the list and let him take care of his property and make sure his tenants have a safe environment to do their work. Mr. Marrero replied that being on the list does not create any hardships whatsoever. Mr. Owen said it does for him because he will never know when a letter may come saying that his building is being taken just like what happened with the railroad. He said the railroad took property from the landowner without compensation even though it's starting to look very nice there. Chairman Whelihan thanked everyone for their comments and said there is another opportunity to discuss the matter at the September 3rd public hearing. Mr. Owen asked to speak and commented further about his work to improve his property while Lyman Terrace and the Die Cut Card remained vacant and asked why is does it seem that you're only going after my property. Marcos Marrero disagrees with that assumption and discussed the process of the urban renewal plan and analysis that was done. He said this is the first time the plan was revised and what was considered were the what changes in the area occurred and what has not. He also disagreed with the characterization that his property was unjustly taken and said that the legal process was followed by the City. Chairman Whelihan then reminded everyone of the September 3rd public hearing and thanked everyone for attending.

5. Adjournment

With no other business, a motion was made at 6:12 p.m. by Carl Eger and seconded by Gladys Lebrón-Martinez to adjourn the meeting. A roll call followed:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Yes</u>
Thomas Creed	X
Carl Eger, Jr.	X
Gladys Lebrón-Martinez	X
John Whelihan	X

Respectfully Submitted,



John Whelihan, Chairperson
Holyoke Redevelopment Authority

Documents presented at meeting:

Meeting Minutes of June 4 and August 11, 2020
HRA Financial and Real Estate Notes – August 2020 Update
123 Pine Street Option Extension – Email and related information
Urban Renewal Plan – Major Plan Change Presentation