

**Holyoke Redevelopment Authority**  
**Meeting Minutes - May 20, 2020**  
**Virtual Meeting via Zoom - Meeting ID: 879 1442 3420**

**Members Present:**

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

**Staff Present:**

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

**Others Present:** Councilor Michael Sullivan, Melissa Lewis-Gentry & Neal Robinson (Avalon Lounge & Game Café), Sarah Meier-Zimmler (Holyoke Housing Authority)

1. **Call to order:** John Whelihan called the regular session to order at 5:05 p.m. and stated that the meeting was being recorded via a zoom video conference call. A roll call followed:

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

2. **HRA Board Business**

- a. **Meeting Minutes of February 5, 2020:** A motion was made by Thomas Creed and seconded by Patricia Duffy to approve the February 5, 2020 meeting minutes. All were in favor.
- b. **Financial Report:** John Dyjach reviewed the HRA finances as of May 2020. He said the fund balance has remained stable and noted a few of the larger transactions.

3. **Center City Liquor License — Avalon Lounge & Game Café, 386 Dwight Street**

Benjamin Murphy provided an overview of the Center City Liquor License program and the application for an All Alcoholic Beverage License submitted by Avalon Lounge & Game Café for their newly opened business at 386 Dwight Street which is also known as the Wauregan Building. He then introduced Melissa Lewis-Gentry and Neal Robinson of the business to comment on the application. Neal Robinson explained the restaurant concept and layout. He also listed some of his background in the restaurant industry. Melissa Lewis-Gentry said she is the general manager and that the business is a full service restaurant with game space and that the liquor license would complement these. She added that the company is currently licensed for takeout and the intention is to have a family friendly community space that also features gaming. Ms. Lewis-Gentry said the gaming concept is based on what was Modern Myths in Northampton and that the owner of that business is also an investor. She added that she is a Holyoke resident and much like this program they intend to reinvest in the City. Gladys Lebrón-Martinez asked about the location and Ms. Lewis-Gentry said it's along the Canal near the Children's Museum. She added that they looked around Western Mass for a location and found the perfect space at the Wauregan. Patricia Duffy asked about the business hours and if the kitchen would be available at those times. Ms. Lewis-Gentry said given the current situation some of this is still to be determined but the expectation is to be open from the afternoon into the evening. Neal

Robinson said that the idea is to be open 3 to 10 pm during the week with later weekend hours and that they will also consider opening for lunch on some days. Thomas Creed thanked the business and asked if they are leasing the space. Ms. Lewis-Gentry said yes and it's a five year lease with an option for another five years at locked in rates. Mr. Creed asked about the funding for the business. Ms. Lewis-Gentry said they have secured about 90% of the funding and they continue to work on the remainder. Thomas Creed asked about the number of jobs expected to be created. Ms. Lewis-Gentry replied three or four in the near future and ten to fifteen after the business ramps up. John Whelihan asked if the seating capacity and plans are affected going forward considering the virus and if their model would still work. Neal Robinson said some of this is still to be determined and given the circumstances they've had to consider additional ways to make it work. He said the affordability of the space and the utilities will help make it work. Ms. Lewis-Gentry said they would also look at outdoor seating and their goal is to make the space as comfortable as possible for their customers. Marcos Marrero asked about current seating capacity. Ms. Lewis-Gentry said the current seating is sixty which includes sixteen bar seats. Mr. Marrero asked how people would order food from the tables and if the gaming component would produce revenue. Neal Robinson replied that they will have wait service. Ms. Lewis-Gentry described the potential revenues from the renting of games and from gaming events that would occur. Carl Eger applauded the efforts and said the business and application epitomizes the purpose of the program. He then made a motion to approve the application. Said motion was seconded by Gladys Lebrón-Martinez. A roll call followed:

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

#### **4. Project/ Property Updates**

##### **a. South Holyoke Homes**

Chairperson Whelihan welcomed Sarah Meier-Zimble of the Holyoke Housing Authority for an update on South Holyoke Homes. Ms. Meier-Zimble said that since the last update to the Board work has continued for project funding, design and community outreach. She said a sizable funding from CEDAC was received for predevelopment work and that they are on the cusp of hearing about the invitation to apply for funding from the Community Scale Housing Initiative. Ms. Meier-Zimble presented the updated Phase I design concept and said that it was recently presented to City Departments at a pre-permitting review meeting. She said some of the details are being worked out but it is a twelve unit rental with a combination of one, two and three bedroom units. She noted that other work going on includes an environmental assessment, a Home Rule petition for expedited procurement and the bidding for work related to the MassWorks grant. Gladys Lebrón-Martinez thanked Sarah and said that this housing initiative is very needed in the City and comes at an important time. Thomas Creed asked if the project is scheduled for site plan review. She replied that the plan is to submit in late June to be on the Planning Board's July agenda. He then asked if there is any HRA action needed at this time. Marcos Marrero replied that an ANR to combine the properties can be done under the City ownership but we should prepare to transfer ownership to the HRA. John Dyjach added there

may be a need to transfer ownership to the HRA sooner to accommodate the HHA's due diligence. Marcos Marrero concurred and said it would be appropriate to do the transfer sooner. Sarah Meier-Zimbler said that per the agreement, the eventual transfer to the HHA could occur after project funding is secured. Carl Eger made a motion to approve the transfer of the four parcels to HRA ownership. Said motion was seconded by Thomas Creed and a roll call followed:

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

**b. 123 Pine Street / Dwight Street Community Garden**

Benjamin Murphy explained that the process continues to relocate the Community Garden. He said that the actions requested of the Board are to approve the transfer of property ownership from the City to the HRA, approve an utility easement for the HG&E to locate a switchbox on the property and to enter into an agreement with the Valley Opportunity Council to provide and install a fence at no cost to the HRA. Marcos Marrero noted that the transfer of the property was previously approved by the City and the time to do the transfer is now because of the easement and improvements starting to occur. He added that the project budget is helped by the VOC donating the fence. Patricia Duffy made a motion to approve the property transfer, the utility easement to the HG&E, and the agreement with VOC for the fence donation. Said motion was seconded by Carl Eger and a roll call vote followed:

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

**c. 216 Appleton Street**

Marcos Marrero announced that a \$300,000 historic tax credit was recently awarded which brings the total to \$2.3 million for the project. He said this now positions Winn to begin the process to apply for the 9% housing tax credit. John Dyjach said that since the last HRA meeting he's communicated with the Building Commissioner to ensure the property is on the regular inspection schedule for the department. He then explained that over the last month representatives of Winn have been at the building three times doing inspections and design work. He referred the Board to the pictures taken by a drone Winn used to inspect the property. Mr. Dyjach said that Councilor Michael Sullivan recently walked the building with a representative of the Building Department. He said that he was unaware that they were joined by a person from a salvage company and referred the Board to the pictures and letter provided by Councilor Sullivan. Gladys Lebrón-Martinez commented about the importance of keeping this project moving forward because of the need to develop new housing options in the City. Thomas Creed asked if Winn's representatives inspected the exterior and interior of the building. John Dyjach replied that they did on each occasion. Councilor Sullivan clarified that the person that joined him was not from a salvage company but a person he's known that

represents a company that purchase timbers. He asked this person to join them to estimate the value of the timbers. He said that if it came to demolition the value of these would be about \$200,000 to offset the demolition cost and that what the letter says is to expect that value to decrease 25% annually so in a few years there would be no value. The Councilor explained that the building is deteriorating at a rapid rate and with what is happening at other building this is a disaster waiting to happen. He said that if Winn is serious about doing this project they must put money in now to stop the deterioration. Marcos Marrero asked that in the Councilor's demolition experience what does he think it would cost to demolish the six buildings that make up this property. Councilor Sullivan estimated that including abatement and through the bidding process it could be around \$2 to \$2.5 million but since the City has some in-house capacity this could probably done more in the neighborhood of \$300,000 to \$500,000 taking into account the value of bricks and timbers. Carl Eger thanked Councilor Sullivan for his expertise and commented that Winn needs to do something with the building by December to ensure the project can continue. Thomas Creed said that he understands the concerns but because this project and partnership is so important a discussion should occur with Winn as to what the timeline is. He said that public safety is the biggest concern but the \$200,000 in salvage shouldn't be what drives this. He added that we should have a more detailed discussion about Winn's obligations and then speak with them about what is needed to have the best shot for this to be successful. Councilor Sullivan said not to get him wrong that this is about the \$200,000 but the point being that the value to support demolition costs will decrease. He said the public safety issue could happen at any time and Winn doesn't have the luxury to cobble funds together over several years. John Whelihan asked if Winn should meet with the Board and what the timeline should be. Thomas Creed said that his thought is for the HRA to have a more detailed discussion about Winn's obligations at the June meeting before they come in. The Board agreed to this approach.

**d. Holyoke Armory (163 Sargeant Street / URP Area 4)**

Benjamin Murphy reminded the Board of the ongoing building evaluation and concept design that are being funded by MassDevelopment. He gave a brief update that preliminary designs are being developed by the architect which will be provided to the Board at a future meeting.

**e. Canal Row Land Option**

John Dyjach explained that the Canal Row's option to purchase land on Race Street from the HRA comes due June 30<sup>th</sup> and that a recent communication from the developer will be discussed in the executive meeting.

**f. Urban Renewal Plan - Amendment**

Benjamin Murphy referred the Board to the timeline which has been pushed back a few months due to the pandemic. He said that given the full agenda for today's meeting the expectation is to review the amendment at the next meeting. Marcos Marrero noted that staff has prepared sheets detailing individual properties which will be provided to the Board. Gladys Lebrón-Martinez asked if there have been changes since the Board last discussed. Ben Murphy replied there are a few which will be detailed to the Board. Thomas Creed suggested a dedicated meeting for this topic and after some discussion the Board agreed to do so on June 4<sup>th</sup>.

**5. Other Business**

**a. Hotel Jess Historic Tax Credit Award (335 Dwight Street / URP Area 5)**

Benjamin Murphy said this matter is on the agenda to inform the Board that this project was awarded another \$100,000 to bring the total to \$200,000. John Dyjach said that although the property is in the URP it is a private project being done by Witman Properties. Marcos Marrero noted that this project also involves an equity investment by MassDevelopment as part of the Transformative District Initiative that staff was involved in. He said the project is for a mixed-use with a restaurant that likely would seek a Center City Liquor License.

**6. Executive Session**

A motion was made by Thomas Creed and seconded by Carl Eger to enter into executive session. Chairperson John Whelihan said that in accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 30 Section 21(a) of the Open Meeting Law, the Holyoke Redevelopment Authority will enter Executive Session at this time to consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real estate, if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body. A roll call followed:

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

**7. Adjournment**

With no other business, a motion was made at 6:54 p.m. by Thomas Creed and seconded by Patricia Duffy to adjourn the Regular session. A roll call followed:

| <u>Name</u>            | <u>Yes</u> |
|------------------------|------------|
| Thomas Creed           | X          |
| Patricia Duffy         | X          |
| Gladys Lebrón-Martinez | X          |
| John Whelihan          | X          |

Respectfully Submitted,

John Whelihan, Chairperson  
Holyoke Redevelopment Authority

Documents presented at meeting: February 5, 2020 Meeting Minutes / Financial Notes / Center City Liquor License Application / South Holyoke Homes Phase I Design Concept / Community Garden Utility Easement / Community Garden Fence Contract / Urban Renewal Plan Amendment Revised Timeline

  
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