

**Holyoke Redevelopment Authority
Meeting Minutes - September 23, 2020
Virtual Meeting via Zoom - Meeting ID: 825 9828 3962**

Members Present:

John Whelihan, 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

1. **Call to order:** John Whelihan called the meeting to order at 5:05 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
Patricia Duffy	X
Carl Eger, Jr.	X
John Whelihan	X

2. **HRA Board Business**

- a. **Meeting Minutes of August 26 and September 3, 2020:** Carl Eger noted a correction required to the end of the August 26th meeting then made a motion to accept the minutes of both meetings. Said motion was seconded by Patricia Duffy to accept the minutes of the August 26th meeting as amended and the September 3, 2020 meeting. A roll call followed:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Yes</u>
Thomas Creed	X
Patricia Duffy	X
Carl Eger, Jr.	X
John Whelihan	X

3. **Project/ Property Updates**

- a. **Community Garden Relocation:** Benjamin Murphy described the draft Memorandum of Understanding with Nuestras Raices regarding the relocation of the community Garden. He noted that the agreement lists the responsibilities to relocate the garden and that the maximum amount of the funding is \$25,000. Thomas Creed asked to clarify that no check is being issued but the amount represents a value of services and if there is a scope or a budget included. Ben Murphy answered that it is accurate that no check is being provided and referred to Exhibit A that lists the services being provided. Marcos Marrero added that the wording could be tweaked so that the compensation is listed as in-kind and not mistakenly read that a check is being provided. John Whelihan asked about the status of the utility easement. Ben Murphy replied that the expectation is that the Holyoke Gas & Electric will record the easement before the property is transferred from the HRA to Nuestras Raices.

- b. **123 Pine Street:** John Dyjach said that VOC started to submit permit applications for the project including one for a zone change. He noted that, as the owner of one of the parcels, the HRA may need to sign off on the applications. Marcos Marrero explained that the necessity for some of the permitting and for a zone change are under question and that staff and VOC will be discussing in the near future.
 - c. **216 Appleton Street:** John Dyjach said that a Historic Tax Credit of \$300,000 was recently awarded which brings the total award to \$2.6 Million.
 - d. **37 Appleton Street:** John Dyjach said that staff was recently contacted by American Environmental about the availability of land near their Canal Street location. He said that during that discussion a request was made to the company to provide an update on the status of the 37 Appleton Street project and that information is pending.
- 4. Urban Renewal Plan Amendment - Update and Preparations for Public Hearing:** Marcos Marrero said that the purpose of this agenda item is to get feedback from the Board as to the public hearing on the plan amendment and to discuss next steps before the continuation of the hearing. He explained that he reached out to all the DGR members and other City Councilors that were at the public hearing but so far has not received feedback. Mr. Marrero said that other than what was stated at the hearing there have been some other general questions. He noted the comments made by Mr. Edward Owen about 120 Front Street at the hearing and said there were questions from the owners of other properties such as the Free Masons property, the Elm St. auto shop and a few others including Councilor McGiverin's question about the parking lot on Maple Street across from Francie's Tavern. Ben Murphy added that there were also communications expressing concerns from the owner of 111 Lyman Street and from Mr. David White in regard to the Richardson train station. Thomas Creed said that he is not supportive of changing anything from the proposed amendment and was disappointed there was no additional feedback from those who spoke at the hearing. Carl Eger was not surprised there wasn't feedback but thinks the plan speaks for itself. He added that it is large and dynamic and will be the best basis to proceed. Patricia Duffy asked if it is worthwhile for Board members to reach out directly to Councilors. Marcos Marrero said that could be done. Carl Eger said that from his perspective the opportunity was given and that we proceed to the next meeting. John Whelihan said that what he heard is that there are enough vacant properties to address and that we shouldn't be going after occupied buildings that are being utilized even if they are not considered the highest and best use. Marcos Marrero said he also heard that sentiment but it is not incongruent to the plan in that underutilization over time often leads to degradation and vacancy. He added that he understands that there can be disagreements on the approach. Thomas Creed said that it isn't that we are going after a building but it is an effort to identify neighborhoods and parts of urban Holyoke that collectively can be transformed into something far better than it is today. He added that he has a lot of respect for property owners like Mr. Owen and all others that try to improve their properties, have tenants and pay taxes yet find themselves as part of this plan. He explained that these properties are in the plan because we are trying to make sure that the neighborhood they are in is ultimately the neighborhood they have a part in twenty

and thirty years from now or will they deteriorate like some of the other areas in the urban center. He added that by not addressing entire neighborhoods, holes could be left and recovery will be more difficult. Mr. Creed said it is important that this message is heard and understood but was concerned that there wasn't enough feedback from councilors that spoke at the first public hearing. He is concerned that it will again be the case at the hearing continuation. Carl Eger appreciated this but thinks the message was made and we are providing the guidance. He said the hearings could be more effective if done in person and questioned if that could be explored. Marcos Marrero explained that couldn't be done because of the safety protocols that are in place. Mr. Marrero commented that councilors may have not responded because they have not heard from constituents and they are possibly waiting to hear if there is more feedback at the next hearing. John Whelihan asked if information could be provided showing the percentage of vacant versus occupied properties that are being proposed. Marcos Marrero said this could be done in a similar way to what was provided in 2012. There was then discussion on the protocol expected at the next public hearing. Marcos Marrero anticipated that staff would provide a recap which would lead to questions. John Whelihan said it would also be good to highlight past successes. Marcos Marrero said these would be good to summarize and to show the complexity of some projects and how being in the plan could leverage resources. Patricia Duffy noted that it was important that the board was fully represented at the hearing. John Dyjach said that a benefit of the process has been new engagements with property owners. He added that about five of the city-owned properties proposed to be included in the plan have either recently sold or are in process of being sold.

5. Other Business

a. Canal Row: John Dyjach said that the Option Agreement with Canal Row provided with the meeting materials is being circulated for signatures. He said the next step with Canal Row is to finalize the sale agreement for Race Street parcel 15.

b. Patricia Duffy announced that before the upcoming annual meeting she will be stepping down from the HRA as she has new responsibilities and to give someone else an opportunity to serve. She said it was great experience working with everyone and especially with Tom and Carl from the very beginning.

6. Adjournment

With no other business, a motion was made at 6:00 p.m. by Carl Eger and seconded by Thomas Creed to adjourn the meeting. A roll call followed:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Yes</u>
Thomas Creed	X
Carl Eger, Jr.	X
Patricia Duffy	X
John Whelihan	X

Respectfully Submitted,



John Whelihan, Chairperson
Holyoke Redevelopment Authority

Documents presented at meeting:

Meeting Minutes of August 26 and September 3, 2020

Urban Renewal Plan Amendment Property List

Nuestras Raices Relocation Agreement

Canal Row Option Extension