

Holyoke Redevelopment Authority
Meeting Minutes - January 19, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting via Zoom - Meeting ID: Meeting ID: 894 6946 6507

Members Present:

Thomas Creed, Chairperson
John Whelihan, Treasurer
Daphne Board, Assistant Treasurer

Staff Present:

Aaron Vega, Executive Director
John Dyjach, Assistant Director

Others Present: Attorney Michael Bissonnette, (Law Department)

1. **Call to order:** Chairperson Thomas Creed called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. and stated that the meeting is being held virtually per the Governor’s March 12, 2020 executive order and being recorded via a zoom video conference. A roll call followed:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Present</u>
John Whelihan	X
Thomas Creed	X
Daphne Board	X

2. **Pine & Dwight Street Community Garden / Neighbor to Neighbor - License Agreement for 772 Dwight Street:** Chairperson Creed said this is the primary topic for the meeting because the License Agreement expires at the end of the month, and it was necessary to have something in place at least for the interim period while a longer term is determined. Aaron Vega then explained that staff has been in contact with Neighbor to Neighbor and it appears they have been maintaining the property after recent storms. He discussed with them to formalize a more detailed maintenance plan in accordance with the existing agreement and that we would like to have this finalized by the February HRA meeting. He added that after this was finished the idea would be to extend the license agreement for the rest of the year which would give enough time to discuss the potential sale of the property. John Dyjach noted that he thinks we are getting closer on the maintenance plan and that the suggestion is to extend the license for 30 days to get it resolved. Chairperson Creed suggested the extension be sixty days just in case of any unseen events that could cause delay. He added that if possible, it would be good to have Neighbor to Neighbor at the February meeting to discuss their plans as well as have the draft of a longer extension to consider. He asked if there were any additional comments and if not, he would entertain a motion to extend the agreement for 60 days from the existing expiration of January 28th. Said motion was then moved by Daphne Board and seconded by John Whelihan. A roll-call vote followed.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Yes</u>
John Whelihan	X
Thomas Creed	X
Daphne Board	X

3. **Other Business:**

- a. Thomas Creed talked about a recent meeting with he was part of with John Whelihan and staff to discuss potential upcoming priorities for the HRA related to the urban renewal plan. He said this was brought up at the last Board meeting to have staff and two Board members begin the discussion and bring back ideas to a future meeting. Chairperson Creed said the meeting started with the obvious fact that the HRA is dealing with limited resources and capacity and needs to not lose focus on the current priorities such as South Holyoke, 216 Appleton, 123 Pine and others. He

said the consensus of the meeting seemed to be that High Street especially the southern end was the next area of focus. However, it was also determined that the HRA should talk with constituents starting with the Mayor and then City Councilors for Wards 1 and 2. Chairperson Creed said this does not preclude us from working on other projects especially if some resources become available. John Whelihan agreed and added that the area on High Street has seen many more vacant lots and empty buildings recently and it would be to have attention there. He noted the area around the former Essex House and said it would be good to star an inventory of what is there. Daphne Board said this could also be coordinated with the City’s Problem Property Group to identify properties with issues. Aaron Vega agreed and said that identifying High Street is timely because the office has applied to MassDevelopment’s Transformative District Initiative for assistance for the area on High St. from about Appleton down to 391. He said the area was dubbed the Southern High Street District or So. High District. He said the program would provide direct staff support and potential project funding. Thomas Creed said High Street seemed logical, but we also do not want to lose sight of improvements needed along Main Street especially to compliment South Holyoke Homes. Thomas Creed said this was a good first session that will lead to more discussion, a meeting with constituents and follow-up for things like a property inventory. He suggested that a walking tour would be helpful when the weather is better. Aaron Vega agreed and said he would also want to invite the Building Commissioner and Board of Health Director to provide more insight. Daphne Board asked if all Councilors would be invited. Thomas Creed replied saying he thinks so but that there would also be a separate meeting specifically with the Ward 1 and 2 Councilors.

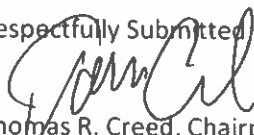
- b. Aaron Vega indicated that new hirings in the office for the Head Clerk and Development Specialist are expected to start soon and they will also support the HRA’s work. He said one of the projects he would like the Development Specialist to work on is the code improvement grant concept that has been discussed.
- c. Aaron Vega said that the License Board at this point decided not to proceed with reducing renewal fees or matching the HRA’s contribution. He will follow-up with them to keep the door open for the idea. He said that he would ask the HRA Board to continue considering a fee reduction although there are currently no pending applications.
- d. John Dyjach mentioned that the agreements are being finalized for property transactions for South Holyoke Homes and that 123 Pine Street is nearing a decision on closing on the sale.
- e. Atty. Mike Bissonnette mentioned that the DPW is investing in infrastructure improvements including on High and Maple Streets and suggested this be kept in mind to align with the HRA efforts. Chairperson Creed thanked Atty. Bissonnette and said that this coordination is important as it was for the South Holyoke improvements.

4. Adjournment:

With no further business and no executive meeting a motion was made by John Whelihan and seconded by Daphne Board to adjourn the meeting at 5:28 p.m. A roll-call vote followed.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Yes</u>
John Whelihan	X
Thomas Creed	X
Daphne Board	X

Respectfully Submitted,


 Thomas R. Creed, Chairperson