

Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency

Meeting Minutes

December 19, 2017

The monthly meeting of the Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency (URA) was held on December 19, 2017 in city council chambers.

The following commissioners were in attendance:

Jimmy Dill, chair
Rita Conley
Lloyd Franklin, Sr.
Travis Martin
Kirby Mouser

Also in attendance were:

Leigh Cockrum
Ryan Watley

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to approve the November 21, 2017 minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mouser and CARRIED.

Commissioner Dill reminded everyone to file a financial disclosure with the Secretary of State.

Commissioner Dill called Steve Miller, Finance Director with the City of Pine Bluff, about applying for a federal tax identification number. Mr. Miller was out of the office today. Dill will try again.

Dr. Watley stated that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) can't be signed for a broad purpose with the URA but one will have to be signed on a case-by-case basis. A MOU will also have to be prepared when the URA's plan has been approved.

Dr. Watley reported on a meeting held this morning with Jack Truemper of Stephens, Inc. about the loan process against the sales tax receipts. GFPB and the City will only be able to borrow \$2M against real property. If this loan is made, the URA will have approximately \$207,000 per month to accomplish the goals of the URA's Plan.

Dr. Watley reported that the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality would not allow the America's Best Inn be demolished without asbestos abatement. Dr. Watley is exploring a grant to assist with removing the asbestos through a Brownfields grant as a bid was given to remove the asbestos for \$384,000.

The Regency Inn, formerly Admiral Benbow Inn, has not been condemned. The City has located the owner and GFPB will assist him with a Brownfields grant if the building has asbestos.

Environment Protection Associates of Little Rock tested the motel for \$1,200.

The City has resources to test as well, at no cost, but GFPB chose to pay for the testing for the motel due to the size of the building and being the first building to demolish.

Dr. Watley will research the possibility of having prisoners trained to remove asbestos.

The URA would like to get quotes from Pine Bluff insurance companies for insurance on the Gene Hunt building. Ms. Cockrum will contact Bob Smithey, Milner Insurance and First Arkansas for a quote.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION if the URA accepts the building donation from Mr. Hunt, liability and abstract insurance will be purchased. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and CARRIED.

Dr. Watley will check with Mr. Miller to be sure the URA can accept the donation of a building and that there are no liens.

Ms. Cockrum reported that as a commissioner, liability insurance is provided by the Arkansas Municipal League but with some restrictions. Ms. Cockrum will obtain quotes from First Arkansas and Milner Insurance for coverage for the commissioners.

Ms. Cockrum reported three applicants have applied for the Executive Director's job at this time. The position was posted on the City's website as well as advertised in the *Pine Bluff Commercial, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, and on the Dem-Gaz on-line board. The deadline for applications is 5:00 p.m., January 16, 2018. The commissioners want to see all applications.

Commissioner Dill asked the commissioners to start thinking about the questions they would like to ask applicants during interviews so that a list can be made so that all applicants will be asked the same questions.

Dr. Watley reported he hoped he would have an outline of the URA's Plan today. The Plan will identify the legal description of the URA's focus area, neighborhood revitalization, Third to Fourth Streets on Main, and addressing main thoroughfares.

Dr. Watley learned of a housing development fund at Simmons Bank and is gathering information about it.

Dr. Watley has been meeting with Habitat for Humanity out of Little Rock about the programs they have for home ownership as an incentive for first responders and teachers. Under this model, the URA could obtain a house, sell to Habitat for Humanity (HH) for a sum, such as \$1.00. HH would find the family to put in the home and help them with the funding to renovate and own the home. They hope Jefferson County's Habitat for Humanity can adopt this model.

Jefferson County's Habitat for Humanity is working on rebuilding their program and are considering opening a restore in Pine Bluff.

There are two ways the URA can obtain property: municipal liens and foreclosed homes. With the foreclosed homes, the URA could approach the entity that owns the property, i.e., Wells Fargo, and ask them to donate the property to us.

Another way to revitalize neighborhoods is to work with the Pine Bluff Housing Authority. More information is needed.

Questions/comments related to this discussion:

- Once the house/property is out of the URA's hands, how can we be sure our purpose is fulfilled?
- Who is the pool of loan funds available to that Simmons Bank has?
- How do other cities do this?
- Can we give directly to someone?
- Can we specify who the owner would be, i.e., first responder or teacher?
- There are private developers in other areas that put stipulations on homeowners, i.e., yard maintenance.
- There are other characteristics that make a neighborhood than houses such as transportation, street lighting, etc.
- Do we know if there are any first responders or teachers that would take advantage of this program?

Dr. Watley will gather more information.

Main thoroughfares, in part, consist of 5th and 6th from Main to Ohio and 28th and 29th from Hazel to Olive. Thoroughfares give a first impression of our city and we need to concentrate on cleaning them up first.

Dr. Watley believes the downtown issues will be taken care of through the plans the Community Design Center is preparing for GFPB.

There is some "low hanging fruit" with condemned homes, burn outs and foreclosed property that can be taken care of fairly quickly. It would be nice to maintain the character of the neighborhoods as much as possible.

Commissioner Dill excused himself from the meeting during the following discussion.

Dr. Watley asked the remaining commissioners how they felt about purchasing property between 4th and 3rd Avenues, Main Street to Pine Street. Elvin Moon owns a lot of that property and is in bankruptcy. The commissioners were interested. It may be difficult to deal with the banks.

Dr. Watley will find out more information on the buildings such as who the owner(s) is/are, appraised value, etc.

Commissioner Dill rejoined the meeting.

Due to holidays in January and February, the city council meetings will be held on the same night as the scheduled URA meeting. The URA will meet at Pine Bluff Title Company those two months.

Ms. Cockrum reported on the URA website link that will be on the City of Pine Bluff's page. She is working with them to get the link set up.

The URA's Executive Director will be considered an employee of the City of Pine Bluff and will receive City benefits.

The matching grants the URA voted on last month for the Masonic Temple and the Hotel Pines were withdrawn by the Public Private Partnership Committee due to public funds can't source non-profits. The Saenger Theatre is owned by the City so the URA can fund matching funds if granted by the Historic Preservation Grant program.

Commissioner Mouser has been in negotiations with a property on Main Street (Long John Silvers) to be donated to Neighbor to Neighbor prior to being appointed to the URA. He will remove himself from those negotiations if the other commissioners feel there is a conflict of interest. No one believes there is a conflict of interest.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

/s/ Leigh Cockrum
Leigh Cockrum
Recorder

/s/ Wm. Kirby Mouser
W. Kirby Mouser
Secretary