

Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency
Meeting Minutes
November 21, 2017

The monthly meeting of the Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency (URA) was held on November 21, 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

Judge Rob Wyatt swore in the five commissioners. Chairman Dill reminded the commissioners a financial disclosure needed to be filed with the State of Arkansas. Ms. Cockrum has e-mailed to everyone instructions on how to file on-line.

The meeting was called to order at 5:38 p.m.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to approve the October 17, 2017 minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martin and CARRIED.

The Bylaws were reviewed. Article III, Section 1, G, regarding commissioners being exempt from execution or other liability from any debts of the URA and that no commissioner will be liable or responsible for any debts or liabilities of the Agency; Dr. Watley will research insurance options and report to the URA next month.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to approve the Bylaws as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and CARRIED.

Nominations for Treasurer were accepted. Commissioner Conley nominated Commissioner Franklin, Commissioner Martin seconded the nomination. Commissioner Franklin was ELECTED Treasurer.

Nominations for Secretary were accepted. Commissioner Franklin nominated Commissioner Mouser, Commissioner Conley seconded the nomination. Commissioner Mouser was ELECTED Secretary.

Term lengths were drawn by lot:

Lloyd Franklin, Sr., 1 year
Jimmy Dill, 2 years
Kirby Mouser, 3 years

Rita Conley, 4 years
Travis Martin, 5 years

Steve Miller, city Finance Director, will assist Chairman Dill with getting a tax identification number (TIN) for the URA. The city will be able to provide the URA accounting services in a separate account provided the URA has its own TIN; otherwise, will have to go through the city council for all expenditures. The URA will also need a TIN to be able to accept grants and donations.

Commissioner Mouser made a MOTION for Commissioner Dill obtain a tax identification number for the Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Franklin and CARRIED.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the URA and Go Forward Pine Bluff was reviewed and discussed.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to TABLE a vote on the MOU until Assistant City Attorney Joe Childers has a chance to review. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and CARRIED.

Commissioner Franklin stated he preferred Mr. Childers' opinion be in writing.

Dr. Watley reviewed GFPB's sales tax budget submission to the City. \$3,000,000 has been budgeted for the URA. Individual line items can be adjusted by the URA as needed.

Dr. Watley wanted the URA to see the entire budget submitted. The Planning and Development Committee has approved a do-pass and it will be taken to the city council for approval on December 4. Total expenses budgeted (\$000) \$6,320; total revenue budgeted \$4,399; net is (\$1,921). By borrowing against the \$2M aquatic center budget item as allowed by Amendment 78, GFPB will be able to expedite projects.

Ms. Cockrum, recorder, was excused from the meeting during the budget line item Staff discussion.

The city's Quality of Life Division has been awarded a funding opportunity of \$50K from GFPB for demolition of commercial property located on Harding Avenue, formerly known as America's Best Inn. A contractor who has equipment in the area approached them with a heavily discounted price of \$36K, for demolition and labor. The city and county would need to be responsible for transporting and dumping debris.

Dr. Watley has contacted Roy D. Smith Construction who has agreed to allow dumping of concrete and bricks at no cost at his landfill, there will be a \$3K cost for labor. The demo contractor will do the best job he can to separate the concrete and bricks from the rest of the debris.

If there is asbestos in the motel, there will be additional expenses. Mrs. Evelyn Horton, Quality of Life Division Director, is contacting contractors who test for asbestos tomorrow for quotes. She is also working with Waste Management for dumping fees.

Removal of the Trice building on Main Street cost \$73K, but there were different issues with that removal and asbestos.

There is also a time constraint due to the contractor's equipment being available. The contractor is bidding other projects that are out-of-town and waiting too long we may lose the contractor's services.

Dr. Watley is asking since the budget hasn't yet been approved, he is asking for a budget adjustment up to \$75K.

Commissioner Martin asked about what exposure the URA will have. Dr. Watley responded none since the property has been condemned. Commissioner Conley asked if the project has to be bid out. Dr. Watley stated the city council should approve waiving the competitive bid process due to cost savings and equipment availability. The award letter to the City will cite a start date of December 17, 2017 and can be extended if the equipment is still here and available. If these conditions change, the \$75K will go back into the budget.

Before the demolition can be started, the city must foreclose and place a lien on the property. They are also delinquent with their property taxes.

We wanted to add the Regency Inn, formerly Admiral Benbow Inn, to this project but that property hasn't been condemned yet.

This project is outside the boundary defined as our focus area. GFPB, Quality of Life Division, the Mayor's office are all pushing because of the opportunity we have – equipment and cost. These types of opportunities will happen from time to time.

Commissioner Mouser made a MOTION that the URA would support the Quality of Life Division to cover up to \$75K for dumping fees if the project comes together. Commission Franklin seconded and after discussion, CARRIED with Commissioners Dill, Franklin, Martin and Mouser voting For and Commissioner Conley for Against.

Discussion:

Commissioner Conley is concerned that the structure is not in place for the URA yet since this is a new entity; no budget approved, no plan. The URA will often be put in the position to approve this type of request due to the condition the city presently is in.

Commissioner Martin commented that sales tax proceeds were not available yet. Dr. Watley stated the first disbursement will be in January and we will be able to pay Waste Management then. The City will bill the URA.

With the commission's approval, we are saying we are in favor of this allocation of our budget.

Commissioner Mouser commented that it is up to the URA to decide what our "boundaries" are, the URA is responsible for the entire city and there will be things come up that is not in the target area.

Commissioner Conley commented that the City should get some of the sales tax money. The Quality of Life Division will have some funds allocated to them for these types of projects. Commissioner Mouser stated there may be some monetary support from other sources.

Joe Childers and Steve Miller will not be considered staff of the URA as they are city employees. Commissioner Dill has visited with both of them and they feel they can handle the URA needs.

Commissioner Mouser stated he is not opposed to the City Attorney's office giving the URA advice, but would like to have the option to hire outside legal counsel whenever the URA may need representation in court. The URA would need a Request for Qualifications in the event outside legal services are needed.

Leigh Cockrum was asked to serve as a technical assistance support person to provide clerical assistance and will not be employed by the URA or the City.

The URA will need to hire an Executive Director (ED). The ED will be an employee of the city and will receive city benefits. A job description has been drafted for the URA's approval. Once approved, advertising for the position can begin.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to advertise for an Executive Director based on the job description provided, salary commensurate with experience. Commissioner Martin seconded and the motion CARRIED.

Commissioner Dill asked Ms. Cockrum to forward the job description to the City's Human Resources department. Applications will be accepted through 5:00 p.m., January 16, 2018.

A map was provided highlighting the URA's Phase I primary target area for developing a "Plan." Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to accept this as Phase I. Commissioner Martin seconded and the motion CARRIED.

Commissioner Mouser has a copy of a document that included condemned properties in Pine Bluff provided by the Arkansas Economic Development Institute to the Economic Development pillar participants. Ms. Cockrum will work on obtaining extra copies for the entire URA.

Dr. Watley stated the city will foreclose on a condemned property if the URA will authorize them to do so. The Quality of Life Division has developed a step-by-step guideline for foreclosing on properties that he will get for the commissioners.

The Historic Preservation Restoration Grant Program has announced a funding opportunity of \$10,000 or more to fund approved restoration projects for properties currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There is a narrative in your packet about the grant. Groups sponsoring three downtown district projects that have applied for the grant for The Saenger Theatre, Masonic Temple, and the Pines Hotel. These funds will be used to limit further deterioration by securing the building to prevent further damage from moisture and other debilitating factors. Dr. Watley is proposing to the GFPB board to provide matching funds if any of these organizations receive the grant.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to support this request as long as the City Attorney's office doesn't have an issue with the request. Commissioner Conley seconded and the motion CARRIED.

Mr. Gene Hunt has contacted GFPB wanting to donate an office building to them. GFPB cannot accept the building. Dr. Watley showed the commissioners pictures of the building he had and stated that the building needs a roof. The roof on the building now is not bad, but there is water around the exterior. Mr. Hunt is willing to donate the building to the URA.

The URA is aware that it will need to get liability insurance, at the least, on the building when the URA takes possession.

Commissioner Martin made the MOTION to accept the property no sooner than December 31, 2017 as a donation from Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Hunt. Commissioner Franklin seconded, the motion CARRIED.

In Other Business, Dr. Watley stated he was trying to get more information to the commissioners and will continue to do so.

Commissioner Conley asked if the City could setup a web page for the URA to post minutes and other information. Ms. Cockrum will contact the City to find out if this is possible or not.

Commissioner Dill distributed packets that contained a set of deeds when the original Urban Renewal Agency took property, and a set when they conveyed property from back in the 1960s and 1970s. These will be useful for this URA to use as a guide.

Commissioner Dill wants to know when and how to take/give property. Need to derive a plan. Commissioner Franklin mentioned title insurance. Commissioner Conley stated a committee needs to be established to devise a plan.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:02 p.m.

Leigh Cockrum
Recorder