

Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency
Monthly Meeting Minutes
May 20, 2019

The Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency (PBURA) held its regular monthly meeting on May 20, 2019 at The Baim Law Firm.

The following commissioners were in attendance:

Jimmy Dill, chair
Rita Conley
Lloyd Franklin, Sr.

Commissioners absent:

Travis Martin
Kirby Mouser

Also in attendance were:

Leigh Cockrum
Dee Herring Gatlin
Eligha Lacy
Jean Painton
Maurice Taggart, Executive Director (ED), PBURA
Ryan Watley

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Commissioner Dill.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to approve the April 16, 2019 minutes as corrected. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and was APPROVED.

ED Taggart reminded the commissioners that meetings are now being recorded and must be retained for one year per a new state law.

Commissioner Franklin reviewed the April financial reports. April revenue was \$815.21, expenses were \$69,994.73. YTD revenue, \$3,880.50, and expenses \$687,013.32.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to approve the April financial reports as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and was approved.

ED Taggart presented a budget adjustment for \$2,500 to cover liability insurance expense for the PBURA commissioners.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to approve the \$2,500 budget adjustment to cover liability insurance as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and was approved.

ED Taggart presented a budget adjustment for \$7,500 for a feasibility study for the Plaza Hotel. The Pinnacle Group is interested in investing in the hotel. They are willing to pay \$5,000 for the study with the city paying for \$7,500. Mayor Washington has asked for the PBURA to underwrite the amount.

The ultimate goal is to get the hotel into the hands of someone who will do something with it.

The study will provide a full evaluation on what the needs the hotel will have in order to be rehabilitated to attract potential investors. ED Taggart stated he may need to come back to the PBURA for additional resources.

Commissioner Conley raised concern over whether or not there is a standard for a public/private partnership such as this and/or will this set a precedent. Could any private entity bring an offer, as long as the property is in the PBURA area, such as this to the PBURA to get advantage of the same type of partnership?

There is a process outlined in the PBURA plan. It depends on where the focus of resources is, will need to work within the spirit of the plan, and be in the urban renewal area.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to make a budget adjustment of \$7,500 to finish the Pinnacle Hotel study that totals \$12,000. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and was approved.

ED Taggart requested approval to apply for a secured credit card with a \$5,000 limit. He is currently using other department's credit cards when he has to pick up something needed for unforeseen costs associated with demolition and office operations, i.e., replace a broken shovel. He will also need it when traveling to conferences.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to authorize ED Taggart to apply for a credit card with Simmons Bank with a \$5,000 limit and follow the same standard processes other city departments use. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and was approved.

ED Taggart provided an update on property acquisitions:

- Closed on the Moon properties on May 16 and now have full control of all properties in Phase 1 of the Delta Rhythm and Blues neighborhood.
- Two properties on Harding were purchased off the tax delinquent list. In the process of getting two properties gifted to the PBURA. No contact on the two other properties in that block as of yet.
- Still in negotiations with property on the east side of Main Street between Fourth and Third.
- Counteroffered \$41.5 on 421 Barraque (the PBURA approved to spend \$46,000).
- Based on previous tenants at the Crown Motel, the PBURA approved ED Taggart to attend an auction to purchase so that there would be some control over the property's use. Our offer was not accepted at the auction and no other offers made. The day after the sale, ED Taggart was contacted about purchasing the motel. There are complex liens involved. ED Taggart has been in negotiations with the three parties involved and one is not being reasonable. ED Taggart recommends to the PBURA not to take further action at this time.

- The property on Convention Center drive will have to be gifted to the PBURA in order for the burn out to be torn down by us. Under current regulations, there isn't enough time to go through the condemnation process. There are two owners of the property. ED Taggart talked with them today and believes they will contact him back to gift the property to the PBURA.
- Phase 2 – Hillocks Neighborhood – south side of the railroad tracks, 4th through 5th and Pine. There are five parcels that Taggart has been making initial contact with the owners.

In Other Business:

- The Mayor recognized the PBURA for assisting with the tornado cleanup at last night's city council meeting.
- ED Taggart attended the Vacant, Abandoned, and Deteriorated Properties Training Academy (VAD Academy) in Houston, May 14 and 15, and made a lot of contacts.
- There have been questions about the PBURA employees being considered city employees for benefits, i.e., pension plan. To alleviate any further questions, ED Taggart has a resolution that will be presented to the city council on June 3 to approve.
- There have been questions and differences of opinions as to the PBURA's statutory authority to demo – and under what circumstances. A Resolution has been written to create a position for a Special Assistant to the Director of Code Enforcement and Demolition and Reserved for the Executive Director of the Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency. This will negate any questions about demolition powers prior to acquisition of the property. ED Taggart will simultaneously be working in two positions. Under Code Enforcement, he would be operating under the power of the City; i.e., city liens, demo, etc.

Commission Conley asked if the Municipal League or anyone else given an opinion on this? It has been presented to the City Attorney's office and to the Friday Firm in its current form. If the Resolution doesn't pass, we may have to seek a higher opinion.

Governing law, 14-169703, governs the ability to demo. Our position is that what we are doing now is within that code. This Resolution will offer additional protection.

This Resolution will also go to the city council on June 3rd.

- Ryan Watley distributed a packet of information on the Delta Rhythm and Bayous Arts District Neighborhood that contained proformas on the project.

Watley talked with a housing analyst who has worked with multiple housing developments in the delta. He helped Ryan with some adjustments to the numbers.

So that tax credits can be used, there will have to be a subsidy and will lower construction costs. There are four strong prospects now.

- ED Taggart and Watley met with the Pine Bluff School District about the old post office on 2nd and Walnut. We want to make the post office into a food hall and the main entrance to the movie theatre. The land the PBURA just closed on would be used for the movie theatre screens and the two buildings would be connected.

There are two prospects for the movie theatre. One of the prospects is having a feasibility study done.

- Taggart and Watley are working on a way to get downtown businesses subsidized.

Commissioner Dill was very complimentary of the work ED Taggart and Dr. Watley are doing.

Public comments were made.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

/s/ Leigh Cockrum
Leigh Cockrum
Recorder

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