

Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency
Annual and Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes
July 16, 2019

The Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency (PBURA) held its Annual and Regular Monthly meeting on July 16, 2019 at The Baim Law Firm.

The following commissioners were in attendance:

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

Commissioners absent:

None

Also in attendance:

Leigh Cockrum
Dale Ellis
Dee Herring Gatlin
Eligha Lacy
Maurice Taggart, Executive Director (ED), PBURA
Mayor Shirley Washington
Ryan Watley

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

ED Taggart read relevant parts of the By-Laws regarding the election of officers.

Four positions need to be filled. Chairman Dill called for nominations. Commissioner Franklin stated he would like to continue as Treasurer. Commissioner Mouser stated he would like to continue to serve as Secretary. Commissioner Martin nominated Rita Conley as Vice Chair.

Commissioner Dill's term is up in October. He will make it known to Mayor Washington that he will continue as Chair provided she wants him to continue to serve on the Commission.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to reappoint Jimmy Dill as Chair of the Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency. No second needed. The motion was APPROVED.

Commissioner Martin made a MOTION to appoint Rita Conley as Vice Chair and reappoint Lloyd Franklin, Sr. as Treasurer and Kirby Mouser as Secretary. No second needed. The motion was APPROVED.

The Slate of Officers nominated were approved:

Jimmy Dill, Chair
Rita Conley, Vice-Chair
Lloyd Franklin, Sr., Treasurer
Kirby Mouser, Secretary

No further Annual Meeting business was discussed and the Regular Monthly Meeting proceeded.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to approve the May 20, 2019 Regular Monthly Meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Conley seconded the motion and was APPROVED.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to approve the June 13, 2019 Regular Monthly Meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Martin seconded the motion and was APPROVED.

Commissioner Franklin reviewed the June financial statements. \$404.68 revenue for the month, \$4,904.53 year-to-date. \$36,308.91 monthly expenses, \$1,358,397.12 year-to-date.

Commissioner Conley made a MOTION to approve the June 2019 financial statements as presented. Commissioner Martin seconded the motion and was APPROVED.

ED Taggart presented a letter dated July 12, 2019 as a formal request for a budget adjustment of \$5,000 from budget line item "Miscellaneous Revenue" to "Downtown Improvements" to cover the cost of the hotel valuation service feasibility study for Plaza Hotel & Suites. The \$5,000 was received from Pinnacle Group through GFPB.

Commissioner Mouser made a MOTION to move \$12,500 from budget line item "Miscellaneous Revenue" to "Downtown Improvements" per Steve Miller's guidance. Commissioner Martin seconded the motion and was APPROVED.

The agenda was deviated to Item IV. ED Taggart requested approval to begin negotiations with the University of Arkansas Community Design Center who was the only firm to respond to the RFQ for Architectural and Engineering Firm for the proposed neighborhood I.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to begin negotiations with University of Arkansas Community Design Center for neighborhood I construction documents. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mouser and was APPROVED.

ED Taggart requested approval to contract with Buckner Realty as an appraiser for warehouse property located at 216 S. Locust. The fee will be between \$2,000 to \$2,500. The report should be completed by July 31.

Commissioner Martin made a MOTION to engage in Buckner Realty's service to perform an appraisal on 216 S. Locust. The motion was seconded by Commissioner CONLEY and was APPROVED.

ED Taggart presented a resolution for ratification to purchase HVS Services for \$12,500 for a hotel evaluation.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to ratify approval of a Resolution to approve the purchase of services from HVS to perform a feasibility study for the Plaza Hotel for \$12,500, which \$5,000 of that is to be paid by the Pinnacle Group. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martin and was APPROVED.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to retract the original resolution to purchase three properties on Main Street not to exceed \$70,000 that was approved June 13, 2019. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and was APPROVED.

Commissioner Conley made a MOTION to approve a Resolution to complete the purchase of 316, 322 and 324 Main Street for \$70,421.63. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Franklin and was APPROVED.

Item III.b. was addressed. The city council will consider creating three positions to administer the demolition program. The budget adjustment will cover the employees, salaries and any other accompanying costs associated to salaries. It will also cover demolition budget. 50% of the current balance of repair and maintenance of heavy auto equipment and 67% of the demolition item. Percentages are listed on the request versus amounts due dates when employees are hired and the date they commence demolition.

ED Taggart anticipates the city council considering the resolution on August 5.

The commissioners recapped why the PBURA is where we are now. One of the city council members requested an opinion from the City Attorney on whether PBURA has the authority to raze structures. The City Attorney has rendered an opinion that the PBURA does not have the power to raze structures on our own. We only have the power if we acquire title to the structures. Out of respect to her opinion, we stopped in our process of razing structures.

Therefore, we have ceased demolition operations and have solicited an opinion from the Attorney General's office.

City of Pine Bluff's Code Enforcement hasn't been razing structures like the PBURA because they don't have sufficient funds in their budget like the PBURA.

The PBURA has discussed transferring salary funds and equipment to Code Enforcement so that blight removal can continue. The PBURA will not have any say-so on who is hired to fill the three positions the City will create. We hope Code Enforcement will give the current PBURA employees the position. The three PBURA positions will no longer exist when funds are transferred to Code Enforcement.

The three positions Code Enforcement is considering is a heavy equipment operator, truck driver and a nuisance abatement supervisor. ED Taggart feels very confident, based on the job descriptions, whomever is hired will be adequately equipped to execute the demolition plan.

Some council members are of the opinion the PBURA is trying to run the Code Enforcement department, i.e., who they hire and what the functions the person performs. Code Enforcement is supposed to be removing blight but they haven't been doing their job.

Concern of the PBURA is that Code Enforcement will be pursuant to the GFPB tax plan the citizens voted on in 2017. If the equipment is transferred and three people are hired to do the specific jobs lined out in the job descriptions, then the initiatives laid out in the GFPB plan will be fulfilled.

If the Attorney General's opinion comes back and the PBURA purchases or acquires and raze property, how can we get the purchase of equipment to do that? The Resolution states the equipment and manpower can be used for any municipal purpose.

The PBURA's purpose isn't just to eliminate blight. It was decided to start work on the removal of blight because it was something visible to the people. It helps the police department with crime, it helps business development by cleaning up some of the thoroughfares, it will accomplish what we set out to do and get property back into a taxpaying improved basis, and to promote investments.

Mayor Washington stated the hiring of the three positions includes a supervisor. The supervisor will be over the demolition area.

The City Attorney's opinion stated that statutorily, the PBURA cannot file city liens. In order to recoup some resources, placing liens on property has to go through the City.

Is there some way the City can transfer liens to the PBURA? The City Attorney is in favor of outsourcing the lien process.

ED Taggart has requested an opinion from the Attorney General which will take about sixteen weeks.

One reason Code Enforcement has not been doing what they have supposed to do in terms of demolition is lack of funding. They have had to outsource demolition which is expensive. They also lack technology and capacity to keep up with the filings and entire process.

The last department heads of Code Enforcement have focused on clearing grass, weeds and junk and not on demolition.

The PBURA is doing a job that should have been done a long time ago and is getting pushback because we are doing too well. We are doing it with taxpayer money and more is done with less money.

There is distrust among some council members with the PBURA. The City will accept the money transfer to them, but they do not want the PBURA to have any say-so on the jobs of the employees of Code Enforcement. There is also a distrust on anything GFPB is behind.

If funds are transferred to Code Enforcement, that will take care of the rest of the year, but what about next year?

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to make a budget adjustment for the percentages out of salaries and demolition based on when employees start and demolition as requested by ED Taggart to

the City's General Fund. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Conley and was APPROVED with Commissioners Conley, Dill, Franklin and Martin voting For and Commissioner Mouser voting Against.

ED Taggart presented a Budget Adjustment to rehabilitate and redevelop acquired downtown properties. We just closed three properties between 4th through 3rd. We have received three submissions for a historical consultant. ED Taggart would like to move \$103K from Demolition Reserve to Downtown Improvements and \$187K from Demolition to Downtown Improvements. We don't know how much it will cost to bring these buildings in the dry.

Commissioner Martin made a MOTION to make a budget adjustment of \$103K from Demolition Reserve to Downtown Improvements and \$187K from Demolition to Downtown Improvements. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mouser and was APPROVED with Commissioners Conley, Dill, Martin, and Mouser voting For and Commissioner Franklin voting Against.

ED Taggart presented a Request for Qualifications for a historic preservation consultant for a post office conversion to a movie theatre.

Commissioner Martin made a MOTION to approve the issue of a Request for Qualifications for a historic preservation consultant for a post office conversion to a movie theatre. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Franklin and was APPROVED.

ED Taggart presented a Request for Qualifications regarding a public-private partnership to design, construction, management and operations of a downtown movie theatre and food hall.

Commissioner Martin made a MOTION to approve the issue of a Request for Qualifications regarding a public-private partnership to design, construction, management and operation of a downtown movie theater and food hall. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Franklin and was APPROVED.

ED Taggart talked with Shirley Scallion who rented the Bingo Hall from Mr. Elvin Moon. ED Taggart stated he felt she should remain renting the building for the time being. City Finance Director Steve Miller and Assistant City Attorney Joe Childers said that the PBURA could continue renting that space to her provided she also provide liability insurance. Her monthly rent is \$1,500. Mrs. Scallion gave Taggart the rent for this month. The PBURA closed on the property in May. We need to collect rent from Mr. Moon for June. We need to ensure we have insurance on the premises. ED Taggart has a meeting with Marilyn Enright in Finance Department this week and will ask her about insurance on the building at that time.

We still do not have an engineering study related to the retention pond grant. The study was due the 26th of last month. This is needed before we can reapply for the grant. Although the drainage area in the grant is not in the Urban Renewal Area, it affects the Urban Renewal Area. We missed the grant window again this year because we didn't have the information needed. The Harding Drain project should help with flooding.

Commissioner Martin wanted to make a statement regarding statements made about PBURA. Whenever someone accuses him of being a part of theft or fraud, he takes offense to this type of language. Commissioner Dill backs up Martin's statement. What was said implied we are doing something devious and deceptive. We are trying to work for the better good of Pine Bluff. Commissioner Martin stated if someone was to accuse him of something, he would like it to be said to his face.

Commissioner Mouser thought all commissioners feel the same way. People who don't come to the PBURA meetings to learn what is actually being done and said, don't need to throw rocks.

Commissioner Franklin would like the PBURA to start looking at companies that renovate houses. There are micro-development/neighborhood programs available.

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