

Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency

Regular Meeting Minutes

September 17, 2019

The Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency (PBURA) held its regular meeting on September 17, 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

Others in attendance:

Leigh Cockrum
Dee Herring Gatlin
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 August 20, 2019 minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mouser and was APPROVED.

Commissioner Franklin reviewed the August 31, 2019 Budget Performance Report.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to approve the August 31, 2019 financial statements as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martin and was APPROVED.

A copy of a letter and statement from Felix Waller, owner/operator, Apex Cinemas, outlining his intent to bring a movie theatre to Pine Bluff was reviewed. Mr. Waller's vision of a movie theater in Pine Bluff also includes a family fun center that consists of a trampoline park, arcade, rock climbing, and laser tag. Mr. Waller plans to collaborate with Terrance Mitchner, owner of Jack and Jill Family Fun Center.

Mr. Waller is set to close on the Walmart building at the mall soon. Mr. Waller was the only RFQ respondee, and the PBURA needs to determine if they are in support of Mr. Waller's proposal or not. Financial commitments will not be included at this time.

Mr. Waller's proposal is not in the downtown area, but the mall area is in the urban renewal area. \$3.7M has been allocated in the budget for the movie theater. Under this scenario, \$500K to \$750K could be used to purchase some of the equipment as well as having a lease agreement with them. Other ways to incentivize Mr. Waller are being explored.

There are alternate plans to put in a beer garden for the downtown property east of the old post office that was originally in the plan for the movie theatre.

Mr. Waller would prefer to put a theatre at the mall so he would have more screens. He has three other theatres in Oklahoma and New Mexico.

Mr. Waller and Terrance Mitchner have been in conversations about a partnership. The PBURA wants to be careful not to put anyone out of business with this or any other arrangement in which we participate. We are using taxpayer money and need to be cognizant of how that money is spent.

The PBURA would like to meet with Mr. Waller. He needs to be told the PBURA would like to table the decision and meet with him before making any commitment.

The Saracen Cinema 8 people were not in business when the RFQ went out and should get the opportunity to respond to the RFQ.

The Saracen Cinema 8 serves a different set of people than what Mr. Waller will serve. They also lease from Mrs. Vu versus purchasing the property. If something happens with Mrs. Vu and the mall, they will potentially be impacted.

Commissioner Conley made a MOTION to table the consideration of Apex Cinemas as a partner for the movie theatre. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martin and was APPROVED.

The commissioners were sent the entire Plaza Hotel & Suites Proposed Reposition and Conversion before the meeting. Select pages are included in the meeting packet. According to the report, the sum of the purchase price and cost of a comprehensive, property-wide renovation is estimated to be \$10.5M.

Dr. Watley stated it is very important that the City has control over that property. There have been recent efforts by an individual to purchase the property and begin operating with room charges at \$45 per night.

There had already been a group working on how to serve the debt on the renovation, working with other investment partners, and packaging everything together when we heard about the purchase attempt.

Now, we need to move more aggressively.

It was stated that we would compete with the Pines Hotel if this hotel is purchased. The owners of the Pines have expressed that they would like someone operating the Plaza Hotel.

The purchase price of the Plaza in the report is listed at \$1.5M but feel that we can get it down to \$1.2M. The hotel hasn't been assessed yet.

An REIO was submitted for a master developer or development partner regarding a public-private partnership to finance, build, and manage a downtown housing division. Taggart has visited with the respondents. An RFQ now needs to be issued so that respondents can make a presentation on their qualifications.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to authorize the Executive Director to post the RFQ to the REIO respondents. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martin and was APPROVED.

The 3.28 acres the PBURA owns between Pine and Walnut needs to be surveyed so that potential investors can determine what they can do with that amount of space and how many units can put in the area.

Commissioner Franklin made a MOTION to allow up to \$5,500 to be contracted to survey the property. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martin and was APPROVED.

Taggart updated on what the demolition crew has been doing since the Attorney General's opinion hasn't yet to come in. They are still performing inspections and getting abatements so that if/when the opinion comes in, we – or Code Enforcement – is ready to start with demolition.

ED Taggart has confirmed that the PBURA is exempt from property taxes.

ED Taggart has the 2020 budget schedule in the meeting packets. The deadline to submit to the Finance Department is September 27, 2019. If the commissioners have any requests for the budget, please notify Taggart by September 24.

The appraisal for 216 Main came to \$68,000.

The PBURA has submitted a Letter of Support to the council to close the railroad crossings at Alabama and State. ED Taggart believes the council has tabled the motion until a study has been performed.

The AG's opinion required a follow-up requiring a more specific question than what was originally submitted. ED Taggart resubmitted the question on September 16th, "Can an urban renewal agency raze a property that has been condemned by the city without first acquiring it?" The PBURA is an extension of the city, and all the process of condemning the property has been completed. All we are doing is following through with what the condemnation says; if the property owner doesn't do anything in ten days, the property will be razed.

Commissioner Mouser expressed that a proposal needs to be ready when the legislature meets next so that we don't have to go through this again. The narrow opinion will allow us to operate until the end of the year or until something else is resolved because the city already has a lot of properties condemned. What about the properties the PBURA has had to recertify that the city didn't condemn properly?

The PBURA has torn down 14 properties YTD. To meet this year's goal, 86 properties have to be razed, which will not be able to meet.

ED Taggart will submit the properties that are ready to be condemned to the Development and Planning Committee to be approved as condemned so that once the AG opinion is received, we are ready to demo.

ED Taggart will be submitting a request to hire a truck driver. This position will not start until the Opinion is received.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Public comments were heard.

/s/ Leigh Cockrum
Leigh Cockrum
Recorder

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