



CITY OF WARREN  
REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
REGULAR MEETING  
FEBRUARY 23, 2022

The regular meeting of the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) was held on February 23, 2022, at 1:00 PM in Council Chambers of the Municipal Building, 318 W. Third Avenue.

**ROLL CALL**

Chair Michael Boyd called the meeting to order. Members present; Chair Michael Boyd, Vice Chair Gary Sawtelle, Secretary/Treasurer Holly LeMeur, Mindy Saunders and Doug Hearn. Also present; Randy Rossey – Director of Codes & Planning, Scott Taylor – Zoning Ordinance Enforcement Official, Kelly Conti - Recording Secretary.

**MINUTES**

Mr. Sawtelle made a motion to amend the January 26, 2022, minutes to state he lived the bulk of his life in Indiana, not Pennsylvania. Ms. Saunders seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. A motion to accept the January 26, 2022, minutes as amended was made by Mr. Sawtelle, followed by a second from Ms. LeMeur. The motion carried unanimously.

**VISITORS**

- Josh Cotton - reporter for the Times Observer via Zoom.
- Phil Gilbert – Director of Warren County Tax Claim Bureau.
- Thomas J. Christeson – potential buyer for 219 Liberty St.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence to be presented to the committee.

**TREASURER'S REPORT**

Ms. LeMeur reviewed the following:

**Bank Statements:**

*January 2022:*

Beginning balance: \$63,386.73. Deposit: \$7,500.00. Interest earned: \$2.70. Total balance on January 31, 2022: \$69,889.43

Enterprise Development Fund – DCED: \$332,492.51. Revolving Loan: \$332,492.51. Total balance: \$633,566.07.

Mr. Hearn inquired what the \$7,500.00 deposit was for, Mr. Holtz stated it was the City's annual contribution to the RDA.

Mr. Sawtelle made a motion to approve the January 2022 Bank statement, Mr. Hearn seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**OLD BUSINESS**

- **708 West Fifth Ave** - Mr. Rossey presented the Authority with a fact sheet and photographs of the property. Per Mr. Rossey this was declared blighted in 2017. In September of 2018, it was looked into as a possible conservatorship, but no action was taken at that time due to the fact that the property was going up for tax sale. It has since worked its way through the tax process and is now on the Repository List. If the RDA does decide to purchase it, Mr.

Holtz from the DPW has already established it would need demolished. Mr. Gilbert explained the tax process from the beginning with how many years in arrears taxes can be before they go up for upset tax sale. Technically it's three years of taxes due on a property that sends it to tax sale, which means if taxes were owed for 2020 and 2021 and still due along with the 2022 taxes, in September of 2022, the property would be go up for tax sale. The buyer of a property through an upset sale is responsible to pay all liens and judgements against the property. If a property doesn't sell in the upset sale, it goes up for judicial sale the following year where it would be free and clear of liens and judgements. If it doesn't sell at the judicial sale, it then moves on to the repository where it sits until someone makes a bid. At that point we would send the bid to the County, Township and School District to approve it, then it goes back to the Tax Assessment Office. If approved they will reach out to the owner of the approved bid and arrange payment.

Per Mr. Gilbert, 708 West Fifth St. was placed in the repository in June or July of 2020. There could have been a lien put against the property after he did his title research. He advised the RDA to have an attorney do a bring-down search to check for additional liens as a cheaper route than paying for a full title search. Mr. Boyd asked Mr. Gilbert to confirm his research was done in 2020, per Mr. Gilbert it was done in December of 2019.

Mr. Boyd asked City Staff if it was the City's position that this property is an eyesore and needs to be demolished, Mr. Rossey and Mr. Taylor confirmed. Mr. Sawtelle made a motion to move forward with having Solicitor Stapleford do a bring-down title search and to submit a bid to the Tax Assessment Office for \$500 contingent upon a clear title search. Ms. Saunders seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Gilbert stated he would forward Mr. Rossey a copy of the title search information he had from December 2019.

- **Role and mission of the RDA:**

Mr. Rossey provided the Authority with examples of RDA mission statements prior to this meeting for the members to review. Mr. Boyd suggested using something similar to the example that read; To develop and implement creative community-based strategies to enhance economic opportunity, build strong neighborhoods, and ensure a dynamic framework for quality growth and development. He suggested adding something to the statement regarding eliminating blight. Mr. Hearn agreed something about addressing blight needed to be added to the statement. Now that he is serving on the BPRC Committee he sees more clearly the process of blight and how the BPRC Committee and RDA Authority are connected and must work together. He would also like to see the RDA Authority do some things that are proactive and help stop properties from getting to this point, to help catch blight before it happens. Mr. Hearn and Mr. Boyd will work together on a mission statement to present at the March meeting.

- **Land Bank.**

Mr. Gilbert presented a PowerPoint presentation explaining the reasons for having a Land Bank and how they work. In 2018, the law was amended to allow eligible jurisdictions with redevelopment authorities to designate those authorities to act as a Land Bank. Act 33 of 2018, no need to create a new entity.

### How does a Land Bank Work?

- \* Local government passes an ordinance designating its redevelopment authority to act as a land bank.
- \* Jurisdictions can be county, municipal or multi-municipal (requires Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement (ICA)); county-based land banks often seek municipal members.
- \* Can be administered by an existing government department or agency, non-profit or private sector provider governed by a volunteer board of directors selected in accordance with the PA Land Bank Act and the local ordinance – or the RA board.
- \* Subject to all Sunshine Act and ethics laws. Think of a land bank as a set of new powers, not a new government agency.

### Why have a Land Bank?

- \* They are a proven tool for attacking blighted properties.
- \* They remove barriers to getting problem properties back on the tax rolls.
- \* They are a uniform predictable and transparent process.
- \* They are a central hub for blight prevention and remediation efforts.

### What are the Land Bank's key powers?

- \* Acquire property in various ways – especially judicial tax sales.
- \* Negotiate sales and avoid auctions to highest bidder.
- \* Convey property for other than monetary consideration.
- \* Sell property without the restrictions imposed on municipalities.
- \* Extinguish tax liens on property it owns.
- \* Quiet title to property expeditiously.
- \* Hold property tax exempt.

### What can't a Land Bank do?

- \* Eminent domain.
- \* Make a weak real estate market strong.
- \* Solve all the blighted property problems.
- \* Act alone.

The City would not be able to have their own Land Bank unless they maintained a population of 10,000 people or more, however, they can join the County Land Bank and have members serving on the board. A Land Bank would be able to choose the properties they wish to acquire rendering them not an option for anyone else to purchase through the tax sale. Mr. Gilbert recommended doing this step at the Judicial sale. The Land Bank could choose vital properties and work on selling them to entities that are interested in redeveloping them instead of purchasing them and just letting them sit vacant.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **• 219 Liberty Street:**

Mr. Christeson was present to discuss his interest in this property. His company, Dewboi Properties, LLC, owns the former Watt Office Building located at 217 Liberty Street. The company is working on an 18-room boutique hotel at the 217 location and has concerns

about the eyesore next door at 219 Liberty Street. Mr. Christeson asked the RDA if there was any financial help they could provide to help restore the 219 Liberty Street property, that was once the Brick House Café. Mr. Boyd asked Mr. Rossey for his guidance since it has been quite some time since the City has done something like this. Mr. Rossey stated \$332,492.51 are available in the revolving loan fund. He did not recommend allocating the entire amount for this project. Ms. Saunders asked if the RDA would be responsible to pay the cost of the Solicitor Stapleford's fees to draft up the loan agreement, to which Mr. Rossey responded yes. Mr. Boyd inquired what the cost to make the necessary repairs to this property would be. Per Mr. Christeson, after touring the inside of the building this morning and seeing that a good portion of the back would need demolished along with the already known repairs, he estimated around \$675,000. Mr. Hearn asked what Mr. Christeson wanted to accomplish with the acquisition of the Brick House property. Mr. Christeson said he foresees expanding the boutique hotel by adding hotel rooms to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the property a café or retail store of some sort on the ground level.

Mr. Sawtelle made a motion to loan up to \$275,000 to Mr. Christeson for the rehabilitation of the 217 Liberty Street property. Ms. LeMeur seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Details of the loan will be discussed with the City's Solicitor.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment to be brought before the committee.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

With there being no further business to come before the Authority, the meeting was adjourned upon motion by Ms. Saunders followed by a second from Mr. Sawtelle. The motion carried unanimously.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 23, 2022, at 1:00 PM.

Minutes prepared by Kelly Conti.