

February 4, 2016  
Council Chambers-Borough Hall  
221 South 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Highland Park, NJ 08904  
The Highland Park Redevelopment Agency  
Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting

**Call to Order**

The Regular Meeting of the Highland Park Redevelopment Agency was called to order in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act by Chairperson Baruh at 7:35 pm Mrs. Baruh indicated the location of the fire exits.

Roll call

<b>Present</b>	<b>Mrs. Baruh, Ms. McDonald, Mr. Perlman, Ms. Levinson, Mr. Solomon</b>
<b>Absent</b>	<b>Mr. George, Council Liaison, Mr. Baumann, Agency Counsel</b>
<b>Agency Professionals</b>	<b>Mr. Baumann, Agency Counsel</b>
<b>Council Liaison</b>	<b>Mr. Phil George, Council Liaison</b>

**Approval of minutes of previous meetings**

**January 7, 2016 Reorganization Meeting**

There was a motion by Mr. Perlman and seconded by Ms. Levinson with a voice vote by all present the January 7, 2016 Reorganization minutes were approved.

**January 7, 2016 Regular Meeting**

There was a motion by Mr. Perlman and seconded by Mr. Solomon with a voice vote by all present the January 7, 2016 minutes were approved.

**Chairperson and Committee Reports**

Mrs. Baruh said that the “gun shop project” and indicated that one of the issues with this project is the environmental clean-up, and was in receipt of a work scope estimate from Excel Environmental Resources in the amount of \$32,000 that could be paid by the developer. She said that she believed that the developer had this estimate done to see how much it would cost.

Mr. Solomon said that he corresponded with Mr. Constantine who had some internal tasks that he needed to complete and thought that he would have heard something by now, he indicated that he would check on that status of that.

Mr. Perlman said that the Agency could take a look at the proposal from Excel Environmental Resources and comment on it.

Mr. Perlman said that he had been involved with this before and after the site investigation, the next phase is a remedial investigation and once there is an understanding of the type of contamination, there will be follow-up samples and then a remedial action work plan and then the actual remediation work and then there is a requirement for an LSRP to certify all the work. This is the first phase of the process and the cheapest of the steps.

Ms. Levinson asked if there was contamination found on the property is it still the property owners responsibility, she asked if he was still in business

Mr. Solomon said that it is complicated, if there is environmental insurance, the insurance company would come in and start an investigation. The contamination was from a previous owner and he obtained environmental insurance and he feels that he is not responsible and that the insurance company is responsible. He indicated that the owner was still in business but has switched the process.

Mr. Perlman indicated that it doesn't matter who created the contamination you are responsible party.

Mrs. Baruh said that we have not seen the policy so there is a lot of questions. Hopefully they can get Mr. Constantine on board and he can have a conversation with the property owner and give him other options on how to think about this situation.

Mr. Perlman said that they do have an agreement with the developer and there is 180 day expiration and that will need to be extended. He asked if the developer was looking at phasing the project.

Mrs. Baruh said that there were discussions with the developer about phasing, redoing the project so that it is not what she originally thought, it would then be two buildings; one on either side of this property.

Mrs. Baruh said that the Popov property, the International Foods property, the last thing that was done presented a proposed amendment to the redevelopment plan, that amendment was presented to the governing body, Borough Council then approved an extension to the Planning Board and the next step is to have the Planning Board to consider. The next meeting of the Planning Board is February 11, 2016, the Planning Board agenda is full with the American Properties project and have asked for half hour at the beginning of the meeting to present the amendment to the Board and get the Planning Board questions. We have been advised that the Planning Board is a where that the amendment calls for two specific types of relief, one is the set back and other is the parking. The plan as it is going to be proposed includes five new apartments on the second floor. One of the comments received from the Borough Council that whatever solution is arrived at regarding parking that it not be a band aid, that it be a solution. Planning Board feels very strongly about parking solutions. She mentioned that Highland Park

is launching a Parking Review Task Force. Parking is a hot topic and do not expect that the Planning Board will advise the Borough Council to approve the amendment.

Mr. Perlman asked if they understand that this is a small project, do they understand that property adjacent was the old firehouse that Tantum was not interested in this parcel, and if the Planning really wants to see something done here they have to be flexible otherwise this will not go anywhere and they will have to explain to the town why we have another somewhat marginal property along Main Street when we had something that could have made things better.

Mrs. Baruh suggested seeing how we can work it out successfully with the Planning Board, and the points made are valid and they can think about it.

Mrs. Baruh said that Farmers Market property, the parking lot that belongs to the Borough between 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. A proposal was received from Main Street on how that property might conceivably developed and included some building that would be with some activities on the street level and then housing above, there would be some sort of building on the Borough property that would possibly house the Farmers Market. She said that this would multi-purpose and possible hold an arts center or a borough square. It could be a space in the center of town that could serve many wonderful uses. She indicated that the reason why they are looking at this project in terms of an art center is because Middlesex County is making available funding for art centers. She spoke to Jeff Bueler at the State level and involved with Main Street and he was very forthcoming and helpful. The next step is for the Mayor to apply, so the Borough can get free planning services from the State. Jeff Bueler can launch a group of people who would help plan. One of things that she read recently was the proposal that was put together by the Borough of Carteret, they are almost the size of Highland Park, and if anyone is interested Jen could scan and send to the Commissioners. She said that their redevelopment plan is imbedded within the proposal and is very interesting to see, it is also interesting to see what the proposal looks like, the level of detail and this is where we would have to get it, in order to put something together for the center of town.

Mr. Solomon said that he would be interested in knowing if they have a set group that they send in and who those people are versus do they have grants to hire our own people. He indicated that he knows that the County also offers planning grants. He indicated that if there were an option he would go for the grant to hire our own people.

Mrs. Baruh indicated that she does not know right now and the ball is in the Mayor's court. She said that what Mr. Bueler said was that they look at the scope of the project and from that he determines who in his office would make a good team and we may have some input on that what was not sure but the cost if free.

Mr. Solomon said that if he has qualified people he does not have a problem with that. He said that Main Street focuses on downtown revitalization but it is a little out of their wheel house in thinking about development activities as opposed to land use, building and infrastructure and

that is why he wants clarification. He said if they had a planning grant we could hire someone who specializes and get exactly what we are looking for.

Mr. Perlman said that the interesting thing about the planning grant is with the County and Jeff Bueler's grant is with the State and when dealing with that you not only worry about who is a part of your planning team but how long do we have to obligate the funds.

Mrs. Baruh said that Mr. Beuler indicated that the planning process is about 6-12 months. She said that she is sitting on this group with Paul Lanaris, Rebecca Hersh, James Nichols, Phil George, this is a committee to focus on the content of the grant, with a good vision offered by Main Street. She said that she and Jim Nichols agreed that it the building could not be big but would have the wow factor, a place to have activities without duplicating what already exists.

Mrs. Baruh indicated that she had not heard from the Zappia's. Mr. Solomon said that he apologized he has not followed up with the Zappia property, when it was suggested to him that he contact the owner of Jack's Hardware and the Service Station and he did, and the funny thing is he indicated that he had spoken to a gentlemen three times before asking the same exact questions and this time his answer was maybe. Mr. Solomon volunteered to try and talk to the business owner and indicate to him that this would be a good thing for the Borough and would actually help in development aspects and taxes and apologized but had not gotten around to doing that. He indicated that he has also not heard from Mr. Zappia either which he finds concerning. And he would follow-up.

#### Public Comment

Lois Lebbing, North 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, said that in June of 2005 Mayor and Council passed a redevelopment plan and asked if that had been dissolved.

Mrs. Baruh indicated that it had not been dissolved.

Ms. Lebbing said that the part of the plan that prevented 7-11 from moving in because of the need to cut off driveways and stop the traffic and blocking it to save pedestrians. She asked if this project and the existing driveways be closed completely in keeping with plans that were needed to prevent injuries and traffic back-ups.

Mrs. Baruh said that in understanding that what they have right now is an idea for a developer and is not carved in stone at all but the idea that was presented would involve closing up most of the driveways, there would be two driveways that would give access to public parking in the back, which has already been cleared with the NJDOT, the proposed project involves about 65 public parking spots.

Mr. Solomon said that there would be a driveway on each side on Route 27, one ingress only and one egress only. He indicated that parking issues have been in discussion for a very long

time, since the 7-11 and have come to the conclusion that the language within the development agreement, he was the one who was leading the charge against a lot of curb cuts.

Ms. Lebbing asked if that also included the curb cuts on the sidewalks.

Mr. Solomon said that no he was referring to driveways, curb cuts could be for pedestrians or cars but he was referring to cars, so he was the one leading the charge against driveways but the problem is that not all the blocks are the same length, so having one driveway per block in some blocks would be not enough and some would be more than you would need. It was decided to think one driveway per linear feet, it was agreed that it was a good idea but do not know what that number is yet. He said that the next step would be to look at the map and get professional planning assistance to help figure out what would be a reasonable number that would achieve the goal and ensure pedestrian safety in a predominately pedestrian development but have enough driveways to allow development.

Ms. Lebbing said that if she recalls the library began on North 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, then it moved to North 5<sup>th</sup> and is now still on the North side, she indicated that she would be extremely close to her, which she is okay with, if the library is placed on Denison, which will be interesting and near impossible on that narrow roadway, but can't the library share, we teach kids to share, on the South side there is nothing, in the Triangle there is nothing and suggested the Buck Woods area, which is near the intermediate school, municipal building, police, fire, they want to trade, there were documents she purchased from Code Enforcement because she wanted to read the trade, redevelopment for the Buck Woods and the meadows which is 20+ million dollars appraised versus ½ a million for Buck Woods. But if there is a flat surface there you would be close to the schools and you would not have to deal with the kids from the South side crossing a busy State highway.

Mr. Solomon said that he did not disagree at all, but the discussion is not about moving the library, the developer came along and said that they were interested in that site and is interested in making the development whole and would like the library there and if interested will build a beautiful new library to your specifications, so the decision is to keep the current library and possibly not have the development, or library in the new spot, it's not a question of where are we going to put the new library.

Ms. Lebbing asked if the developer is aware that it is on paper as a trade for Upper Meadows 20+ million versus ½ a million.

Mr. Solomon said that it was irrelevant to the developer.

Ms. Lebbing asked if this was the same developer that was after the Sunoco.

Mr. Solomon said no completely different, the developer is young and has made a name for herself doing downtown mixed use redevelopment.

Ms. Lebbing asked if this was going to be a clear sale as opposed to eminent domain?

Mrs. Baruh indicated that there was no eminent domain involved, strictly sale.

Mr. Solomon said that is was a possibility that it will not go forward because the developer is having some troubles in getting all five owners to sell.

Ms. Lebbing asked if across the street at Jack's Hardware was it the old gas station that was mentioned that someone was asking the owner to sell and it was continually no and then finally said maybe or is it the Sunoco side.

Mrs. Baruh said it was the one behind Jack's Hardware. It starts at Bergen's and goes up to International Market but does not include the International Market.

Ms. Lebbing indicated that there was going to be a lot of clean-up at that location and thanked everyone.

#### **Hearing of New Agenda Items**

- HPRA R-2016-04 Bills List

It was moved by Mr. Perlman and seconded Ms. Levinson to approve the bills.

Roll Call: Ayes - Ms. McDonald, Mr. Perlman, Ms. Levinson, Mr. Solomon, Mrs. Baruh  
Nays – None

There being five (5) ayes and no nays, the bills were approved.

#### **Action on any other business**

Appointment recommendation to Highland Parking Review Group

Mrs. Baruh indicated that the Borough under the leadership of Phil George, Councilmember is putting together a group of people, people who are already involved on the board and civilians, to review the parking situation in Highland Park. Redevelopment, Planning, the Borough, as well as Main Street all care very much about this. Main Street and Redevelopment were each asked to name a Board member and a civilian to sit on this group. Main Street is sending their Executive Director and Jeff Perlman. She said that she had reached out to Jeff Ackerman, he is a business owner downtown and he is her nomination for the civilian position and it is now needed that one of the Commissioners needs to participate.

Marcia Levinson volunteer to participate on the Parking Review Group.

Mrs. Baruh said that she would make the recommendation of: Jeff Ackerman, civilian member and Marcia Levinson as the representative from the Highland Park Redevelopment Agency.

Mr. Perlman asked when they were going to have a full Commission.

Mrs. Baruh said that there were two people for consideration, Marsha Shifman who is a Planner and a longtime resident of Highland Park, the Mayor has met with her and would support that appointment. We are awaiting an answer from Ms. Shifman on whether or not she is interested in serving. The other person is Ron de Villa, architect and planner, he has attended meetings and he is meeting with the Mayor on February 11, 2016 and hopefully appoints Ron to the Agency.

Mrs. Baruh indicated that the main take away is follow-up with Jim Constantine, Excel Environmental Resources and take a look at the Carteret proposal.

It was moved by Mr. Solomon and seconded by Ms. McDonald with voice vote the meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Santiago  
Agency Clerk