

January 7, 2016
Council Chambers-Borough Hall
221 South 5th Ave.
Highland Park, NJ 08904
The Highland Park Redevelopment Agency

Call to Order

The Highland Park Redevelopment Agency Meeting was called to order in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act by Rosanne Baruh at 7:48 PM. Ms. Baruh indicated the location of the fire exits.

Roll call

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

Approval of minutes of previous meetings

December 3, 2015

Mrs. Baruh said that a copy of the minutes was previously distributed and asked if there were any additions or corrections. There were none.

There was a motion from Ms. Levinson seconded by Mr. Solomon to approve the minutes of December 3, 2015.

ROLL CALL: Ayes – Mr. Solomon, Ms. Levinson, Mr. Perlman, Mrs. Baruh
Nays- None
Abstain – None

There being four (4) ayes, no nays the minutes of December 3, 2015 were approved.

RESOLUTIONS

- HPRA R2016-01 Resolution Certification of the 2014 Audit

Mrs. Baruh said that this something that the Agency is required to do by law; the language of the certification is in everyone's package. Mr. Guttenplan and herself meet with the Auditor and reviewed the audit page by page, the main issue that the Auditor notes is the segregation of duties, meaning the same person receiving monies is depositing monies, a critic of the Borough as well. Mrs. Baruh indicated that she had discussed this with the Borough Administrator and offered several solutions. There are no recommendations from the Auditor and the Audit appeared to me in order.

There was a motion from Mr. Perlman seconded by Mr. Solomon to certify the 2014 Audit.

ROLL CALL: Ayes – Mr. Solomon, Ms. Levinson, Mr. Perlman, Mrs. Baruh
Nays- None
Abstain – None

There being four (4) ayes, no nays the 2014 certification was approved.

- HPRA R2016-02 2015 Budget Adoption Resolution

Mrs. Baruh said that the Budget resolution is dictated by the State, she noted that the budget amount is \$30,300.00 the same as 2015. There are two escrow accounts set up to cover the expenses of counsel, etc. and are expecting that this budget amount will cover the agency. The agency can if needed go back to the Borough Council as request further funding if needed.

There was a motion from Ms. Levinson seconded by Mr. Solomon to adopt the 2016 Budget.

ROLL CALL: Ayes – Mr. Solomon, Ms. Levinson, Mr. Perlman, Mrs. Baruh
Nays- None
Abstain – None

There being four (4) ayes, no nays the 2016 Budget was approved.

- HPRA R2016-03 Budget – Late Filing

Mrs. Baruh indicated that this resolution was necessary because the Agency’s funding is received from an outside agency, as in previous year.

There was a motion from Ms. Levinson seconded by Mr. Solomon to approve Resolution 2016-03.

ROLL CALL: Ayes – Mr. Solomon, Ms. Levinson, Mr. Perlman, Mrs. Baruh
Nays- None
Abstain – None

There being four (4) ayes, no nays the HPRA R2016-03Budget – Late Filing was approved.

CHAIRPERSON AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mrs. Baruh said that as of December 31, 2015 both Clint Andrews and Ed Guttenplan left to pursue professional opportunities and both left under excellent circumstances and statements that they appreciated time to serve and wish them well and looking to fill those vacancies as soon as possible.

Mrs. Baruh reported on property known as International Foods, currently under a conditional redevelopment agreement with the owner of the property Mr. Popov. The Agency has seen preliminary plans from Mr. Popov. She indicated that the challenge with this is the very small property is going to challenging to redevelopment without some relief from the existing terms in

the Redevelopment Plan. The Agency asked the Borough Council some time ago to prepare an amendment to the Plan specifically to give relief for this particular parcel.

Mr. Baumann indicated that the amendment was actually prepared by the Planner, Clarke, Catton and Heinz and commented on by himself, effectively allow to build his redevelopment project, a two-story building, expanding the size of the building to meet with the adjacent property, expanding to the back 10 feet to the rear with minimal set-backs, it will residential with retail in the front, eliminates curb cuts, and parking is handled off-site. He indicated that the plan had nine pages of design standards will be set forth in the redevelopment agreement between the Highland Park Redevelopment Agency and the Developer. He indicated that there were some blanks and the only reason why it has not been set over to the Borough was because he wasn't sure what to do with the Affordable Housing Element but has a call into the Planner to find out because this is such a small project.

Mr. Solomon asked Mr. Baumann how this works, the Borough is supposed to have an Affordable Housing Plan wouldn't the Borough tell the Agency what they want us to do.

Mr. Baumann said that the Plan probably addresses this but wants to check with the Planner but would like to see a payment in lieu would be reasonable since there are only 6 units in the plan. Once he has clarification he will fill in the blank and forward to the Borough Council.

Mrs. Baruh asked what the rent for an affordable one bedroom verses a market rate one bedroom, the market rate for a one bedroom is approximately \$1500.00.

Mr. Baumann indicated that it varies, there is low, moderate, and there are two different income levels it could be.

Mr. Solomon indicated that it is set at so the income level is based on the median percentiles is of your town or county and then rent is 1/3 of your income. If moderate income is set at 40% of the median and the median is \$50,000.00, 40% of \$50,000.00 is \$20,000, and 1/3 of your income of \$20,000.00 is your rent.

Mr. Baumann said that it is also determined if your family, etc. He asked the Agency if there is anything further to please let him know.

Mrs. Baruh said Mr. Baumann asked that when he gets the answer from the Planner is he going to forward to the Borough Council or is she.

Mr. Baumann said that he was going to a letter to the Borough Council that could be from himself or Mrs. Baruh stating here is the Amendment, with a suggested time table.

Mrs. Baruh asked that it is the Borough Council that would adopt that.

Mr. Baumann said that it begins with the Borough Council and goes to the Planning Board and then back to the Council.

Mrs. Baruh said that the other redevelopment agreement was with Tandum, a couple things to happen with that property, a Brownfields grant is being pursued by Middlesex County that could help pay for Brownfields assessment of properties in that space and that was a big process over the last month. Mr. Solomon suggested bringing on Jim Constantine who is a Planner with an office in Princeton NJ, it is a national firm. Jim Constantine has a wide range of skills but the one thing that he does do is help get a project going when a project stalls in the ways that this has. There was a meeting with Jim Constantine, someone from his office along with the Mayor, and Mr. Constantine he showed a very high familiarity with Highland Park, its needs, concerns and plans and he made various suggestions on how we might be able to move that project forward, including phasing or dividing it and working around situations that don't seem to be resolvable. There was then a meeting with Randy Solomon, the Mayor was present to talk about our interest in using Jim Constantine help move things forward, the meeting was very productive and Tandum has very high regards for Jim Constantine but it is also known that one of the issues is understanding what the situation is for each of the property owners, which of the property owners really have environmental situations that effects what the developer is going to do. She said that they received the LSRP.

Mr. Solomon indicated that that was an LSRP but not assigned that property, which were the Borough's professionals. He indicated that an every site is required to have an LSRP. Mrs. Baruh said that this has to do with all the environmental legislation.

Mr. Baumann said that the take a ways from that meeting are that he reached out to Mike from X-Tel Environmental and asked that he put together a proposal to evaluate the dry cleaner site because that appears to be the only one that does not have a no further action letter for contamination. It is known that that site, based on Mike's review of the DEP files, that property has until 2018 to put in a plan to clean-up the site and until 2023 to clean up and those deadlines can be extended by two years by statue. A proposal will be prepared for him and then will be taken to the MCIA, if it is within the budget and we get a commitment, if it is a reimbursement we will ask the borough to spend the money and reimbursed by Mike and then go the property owner and offer to have his property evaluated for free, as part of a settlement package, free for him paid for by a grant. At the same time Tandum is going to look at doing a smaller project to the south of the dry cleaner, that being something simple, something achievable, if this one looks like it can't happen in a reasonable amount of time. We are awaiting a proposal from the Environmental, wait until April to see if we get the grant, then if that works we will send Jim Constantine with the grant money in to see the property owner or try to work out a deal, all with Tandums or grant monies and in the meantime Tandum is going to come up with a plan b.

Mrs. Baruh said that since the property owner has ten years, this may be within in his time table from when he would want to move on from that business.

Mr. Solomon indicated that the Agency is trying to make the argument with him that there are a lot of reasons why the issues, liquidation of his property will be better now if he agrees. His property becomes much less valuable if it's a little sliver surrounded by the redevelopment and the odds that a developer or anyone is going to have a real interest in putting up monies to remediate a brownfield. He said that he did speak to Jim Constantine and just conveyed to him what the Agency would like him to do and he agreed and asked that Mr. Baumann be in

attendance at a meeting with the property, so that there was someone with authority there that could speak on the brownfields, he asked if you had couple examples of what could occur if the problem is ignored.

Mrs. Baruh said that one of the challenges is to help the property owners understand what the value of their property is; all of us tend to over value things that we own and when you go to sell it's never what we think.

Mrs. Baruh said that there was a quarterly chair meeting and the primary discussion was Rite-Aid. The last month really has been taken up by the Brownfield grant, getting the audit understand and in shape, the budget.

Mrs. Baruh said at the last meeting there was presentation from Main Street, Main Street has been thinking about the Borough parking lot, where the Farmer's Market if held, they are currently occupying the building next door and they went ahead they put together a sketch showing how that area could be developed although a lot of good ideas the Borough was concerned with the financial liability. Meanwhile, Middlesex County is making available if we can tap into monies for an Art Center, there is a lot of interest in this type of thing. A Committee has been put together and the proposal that came from Main Street could form the basis for an Art Center. The thought was that in a town like Highland Park we would want a space that was a versatile as possible, not a theater with permanent seats but rather a big inspiring open space. It is understood that we are at the very beginning and it is very difficult to write a grant without the details of the project so they will be working towards details for that project. The start would be to talk to a developer and see if this would be something someone would be interested in building this.

Mr. Solomon said that it was his understanding that this was a pretty large grant program, very well-funded and other towns have gotten \$5-10 million dollars for their projects. If we got the grant we would have to go out with an RFP.

Mrs. Baruh indicated that this would be a wonderful thing but we have a long way to go, proposals that were submitted by other towns were very detailed and we are very far from that. One of the next steps would be to speak with a local business in town to see if they would be interested in occupying the space, what they would be interested in, square footage, etc. and start to get some numbers into the proposal.

Mr. Solomon said that he has not looked at the grant application and I would think that they would want our financial plan as well. Mr. Baumann said the financial plan would have to be submitted as part of the application.

Mrs. Baruh said that she spoke to Mr. Nichols who is the architect for Main Street; we are looking for large enclosed space such as Union Penn Station in Washington DC, big acoustically open space so that you're not necessarily with theater seating but rather an open space that would allow it to be subdivided, that was the initial idea. People in the room seemed inclined towards a flexible venue. The location would be the same place that Main Street was proposing.

Mr. Solomon indicated that the idea as your looking at the current open space there is going to be some structure that has a back drop, if it goes up 3-4 stories could be commercial and residential but on the first floor there would be a multi-use space, if creative could be closed up in the winter time and can be used for smaller recitals and such and in the summer the front could pop open and there could be performances to the rest of the square.

Mr. Baumann said that maybe they could ask the money for \$10,000.00; he would call the County Administrator, to evaluate the space, what could fit to get yourself something more meaningful, maybe a small planning grant. He said that this is all very specialized, depends on what kinds of acts you are looking for such as comedy, etc., whether you could take seats out for a dance party.

Mr. Solomon said that this is where the financial plan is needed, where is the funding coming from.

Mr. Baumann indicated that this is something that cannot be written by a grant writer or someone from the agency, for example Carteret hired an architect to write the plans for performing art centers. He suggested figuring that out and he would be happy to call the County Administrator because there are small grants that could help get things rolling.

Mr. Baumann suggested meeting with the Mayor and let her know what it is that we are looking to do, here are out thoughts. Mrs. Baruh agreed that that would be a good idea.

Mrs. Baruh said that there are a lot of moving parts to this and getting a planning grant would be a good way to start and then talk about who the professionals would be to make this happen.

Mr. Baumann suggested that the Mayor speak to the Mayor in Carteret because he has been working on a plan like this for five years.

Mrs. Baruh said that she would talk speak with the Mayor and this is something that you cannot just write a grant for.

Public Comment

Ron De-Billa, 609 Lincoln Avenue, said that he loves Highland Park, but would like to see the edits on the Redevelopment Plan.

Mrs. Baruh said that the amendments are on the edits are on-line separate from the plan.

Mr. De-Billa said that he was more interested in the further public discussion.

Mrs. Baruh said that we are actually proposing an amendment to the plan for a specific parcel.

Mr. Baumann said that the Agency suggests things, but has no control over what is adopted. He said that the process is the proposed amendments would be sent to the Council, Council will send it the Planning Board for comment, the Planning Board sends to the Council with comments and the Borough Council introduces the plan with the amendment, then there is a public hearing for

adoption, so there will be at least three meetings that the public will have the opportunity to comment on Block 173, the International Foods Market.

Mrs. Baruh said that the amendment is to give relief to the developer for some set-backs.

Mr. De-Billa asked if the graphics updated. Mrs. Baruh said that the graphics would be up-dated when the plan is revisited.

Mr. De-Billa asked when the plan would be re-visited. Mrs. Baruh indicated that the amendment being discussed right now is just a relief; the agency has proposed and has taken to public meetings, Planning Board and Borough Council an overall amendment to the plan to eliminate everything that isn't the general design standards.

Council Liaison George said that the plan was presented in Conference informally.

Mr. Solomon said that there were still discussions on the curb cuts.

Mrs. Baruh said that the graphics in the plan do not dictate, just photos that that particular planner had.

Mr. Perlman said that the graphics are not accurate either, the old fire house was redeveloped, names of businesses that have changed.

Mrs. Baruh said that what the agency is saying to developers who are interested in a piece of property, come and tell us what our particular needs are, where are you bumping up with restrictions in the plan and we will address them at that time.

Mr. Solomon said that the Agency cares about mix use, commercial and retail on the first floor and that they are multi-story but beyond maintaining structures that are a part of a traditional downtown urban fabric we wanted to strip away some of the stuff that may signal a developer that they are going to have a hard time with that.

Mrs. Baruh said that the biggest challenge is that Highland Park is a series of small parcels, getting site control is very challenging. She indicated that Mr. De-Billa could certainly to anyone on the agency to discuss what occurred in the last hour.

Mr. De-Billa thanked the Agency.

It was moved by Mr. Solomon and seconded by Ms. Levinson with voice vote the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Santiago
Agency Clerk