FINAL

CITY OF LEBANON
WEST LEBANON REVITALIZATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES, JANUARY 26, 2021
REMOTE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS
LebanonNH.gov/Live
5:30PM

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jim Winny (Chair, City Council Rep.); Chet Clem (Vice Chair); Chris Lin; Dean Cashman; Graziella Parati; Gregorio Amaro; Kevin Purcell (Economic Development Commission Rep.); Laurel Stavis (Planning Board Rep.); Lauren Groves;

STAFF PRESENT: David Brooks, Planning & Zoning Director; Shaun Mulholland, City Manager

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1. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Winny called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm

A. Review of meeting procedures and NH RSA 91-A "Right-to-Know" requirements.

Mr. Brooks shared the State directive and participation details for the online meeting in Microsoft Teams. All speakers identified themselves.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. January 12, 2021

A MOTION by Ms. Stavis to approve the January 12, 2021 Minutes as presented. Seconded by Mr. Clem.

Roll Call Vote:
Members voting in favor included: Mr. Clem, Mr. Lin, Mr. Cashman, Ms. Parati, Ms. Stavis, Ms. Groves, Chair Winny.
Members abstaining: Mr. Purcell.
****The Motion was approved (7-0-1)***

Mr. Amaro arrived at 5:36pm

3. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Review of Draft Statement Supporting Removal of Westboro Buildings

City Manager Mulholland stated he had spoken with Executive Councilor Kenney about seeking the release of the appropriated funds. Councilor Kenney indicated he would approach the Governor, but Mr. Mulholland has had no further communication.

Mr. Clem summarized the draft letter of support for demolishing the Westboro buildings, which focuses primarily on having the state release appropriated funds. Chair Winny suggested it would be useful for the Council to know how the committee feels about other potential options for proceeding on the issue. There was discussion of the pros and cons of various approaches and members' willingness for the City to take on greater responsibility for the demolition.

Mr. Mulholland reviewed seven potential strategies for achieving the demolition of the structures for committee discussion.

A. The City offers to a pay more of the cost of the demolition project or all of it.
B. The City pursues an enforcement action against the State under the provision of RSA 155-A which is the building and life safety codes.
C. The City seeks an appropriation in the next State budget process.
D. The City tries to get creative with CDFA to utilize the tax credit program to fund the demolition project.
E. The City offers a no interest loan to the State for a short period of time, such as 5 years.
F. The City resumes discussions directly with the Governor's Office and through our newly elected Executive Councilor to try to get the frozen funds released for the project.
G. The City forms a not-for-profit entity and seek donations for the demolition of the structures.

Mr. Mulholland noted that some strategies involve more risk than others, including the possibility that the City might end up paying for some or all of the demolition. He noted that the City is already taking steps to enforce the building code (Option B). Chair Winny noted that the Council will want to know how much risk tolerance there is. Several members felt the potential benefit of having the buildings removed and demonstrating progress in West Lebanon would surpass the potential costs in terms of future investments. Other members expressed concern about relying too heavily on future possibilities.

Mr. Clem asked if the City might want or need additional funds or actions from the State even after the buildings are removed. Mr. Mulholland noted that the State has agreed to pay for half of the roadway access into Westboro in association with the dry bridge project and that the City will still seek control of the property from the State once the buildings are removed.

It was noted that several strategies can be pursued simultaneously. Mr. Clem recommended focusing on Options F and B and noted he was not prepared to support additional City expenditures beyond the in-kind contribution.

Several members did not want to rule out the possibility of a no-interest loan (Option E) with the idea that achieving a major step forward will recouped in the future.

Chair Winny summarized that all of the strategies seem to have some support, but Options E and G appear to be of last resort. He asked the subcommittee to revise the draft letter based on the discussion. Mr. Clem asked for clarification on the committee's position on Option E.

Mr. Purcell expressed concern about the City's spending and feels the City should protect itself as much as possible. Mr. Mulholland suggested a loan agreement between City and State should be structured like a bond, which is a more formal process, but he noted there is no way to know whether the State would default on loan repayment.

Mr. Cashman asked for clarification on the timeline for the City pursuing action. Mr. Mulholland indicated that action must be taken before the next state budget is adopted. Several members supported including Option E as a potential strategy because the community has been calling for action on Westboro for years and the City won't have another opportunity to act for two more years.

Chair Winny took a straw poll relative to support for Option E: five members were in favor; four members were opposed. Mr. Clem indicated that he would revise the draft letter accordingly.

B. Outreach Subcommittee Preliminary Plan for Contacting Owners

Chair Winny summarized outreach ideas from the prior meeting: connecting parking behind the building and clarifying what owners want or need in order to act.

Mr. Clem offered past surveys and outreach information from Lyme Properties to the committee. He suggested that the committee needs to ask pointed questions to learn what owners need and what would help them take action. He didn't want to ask the same questions that have been asked previously.

Chair Winny suggested a good next step would be outline the specific questions that should be asked to property owners and commercial brokers. Mr. Amaro suggested that outreach efforts should also engage people to get them interested in participating in future efforts. Ms. Stavis noted there is a nucleus of businesses and activity in West Lebanon Village that should be the focus of initial outreach and engagement efforts, as opposed to absentee owners.

Mr. Clem suggested that the subcommittee prepare some potential questions for discussion at a future meeting. Chair Winny hopes to learn what is keeping property owners from redeveloping. Mr. Lin offered to assemble a survey as a baseline for outreach efforts.

Mr. Mulholland noted that EVEC completed business outreach interviews a few years ago and their questions could be a starting point. Mr. Purcell offered to share the EVEC questions.

Ms. Stavis suggested that questions should include a vision component to ask what people might like to see if the Westboro buildings were removed or how other changes might impact people's opinions.

Ms. Parati suggested approaching businesses that represent diversity in West Lebanon as they may have a point of view that is not otherwise represented. Mr. Brooks suggested learning from residents and users of West Lebanon as to what they would like to see happen and making that information available to property owners as they consider future uses on their properties.

Mr. Mulholland noted that the Planning Department will be communicating with specific property owners to invite them to an upcoming committee meeting to guage interest in the potential for connecting parking lots behind buildings and to decide whether to pursue it further. A draft letter to those property owners will be circulated for discussion at the next meeting.

There was discussion about facilitating desirable and appropriate development and whether a subcommittee should be created to take a look at zoning and development regulations affecting West Lebanon. It was noted that historic district provisions might be utilized to have greater control of redevelopment in order to attract more desirable development.

There was discussion about whether Executive Councilor Kenney should be invited to a future committee meeting to discuss Westboro Yard. Mr. Mulholland said he would try to make arrangements with Executive Councilor Kenney to visit West Lebanon and notify committee members who could choose to attend at the same time.

4. <u>OTHER BUSINESS:</u>

Mr. Clem introduced a project he has been working on to promote connections to existing and proposed trail networks in and through West Lebanon. Chair Winny suggested making this a discussion for the next meeting.

Mr. Lin suggested that the committee should have a logo or graphic to help establish an identity for the projects the committee works on. Mr. Brooks mentioned the Planning Department may have funds for such a project.

Chair Winny mentioned the City's property at 3 Seminary Hill and the riverfront park off Bridge Street could be topics for the committee to focus on. He also mentioned focusing on a partnership with the School District for the use of Seminary Hill School facility.

5. <u>ADJOURNMENT</u>:

A MOTION by Mr. Purcell to adjourn the meeting.
Seconded by Ms. Stavis.

Roll Call Vote:
Members voting in favor included: Mr. Clem, Mr. Lin, Mr. Cashman, Ms. Parati, Mr. Amaro, Ms. Stavis, Ms. Groves, Mr. Purcell, Chair Winny.
****The Motion was approved (9-0)***

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
David Brooks
Planning & Zoning Director