

**Worcester Redevelopment Authority
Citizens Advisory Committee
May 14, 2015
8:00 AM
City Hall – Levi Lincoln Room
Worcester, Massachusetts**

Present:

John Brissette, Chair, Jill Dagilis, Vice Chair, Linda Cavaoli, Jack Donahue, Paul Demoga, Allen Fletcher, Honee Hess, Alec Lopez, Stacey Luster, Mable Millner, Hong Tran,

Staff:

Heather Gould, Chief of Staff, EOED
Jackson Restrepo, Special Project Coordinator, EOED
Amanda Gregoire, Project Manager, EOED
Jane Bresnahan, Administrative Assistant, EOED

Mr. Brissette called the meeting to order at 8:07 A.M.

1. Approval of Minutes

Chair Brissette asked the Committee to approve the minutes of the April 30, 2015 meeting. Mr. Donahue made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Dagilis seconded the motion.

2. Theatre District Master Plan Presentation
Crosby Schlessinger & Smallridge Consultants

Chair Brissette introduced Craig Blais, President & CEO of the Worcester Business Development Corporation. Mr. Blais spoke about the Theatre District Initiative, a partnership with the City focused on generating new investment and vitality in an area surrounding the restored Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts. With this partnership, the City and WBDC leveraged investment within the Federal Square area by combining private investment and market strategies with public programming and infrastructure support to promote economic development of the area. Chair Brissette introduced and welcomed Representative Mary Keefe to the meeting.

Mr. Blais introduced Skip Smallridge and Carole Schlessinger. In December 2013, Crosby Schlessinger & Smallridge was hired to prepare a Downtown Worcester Theatre District Master Plan. Mr. Smallridge informed the group that the plan was introduced in January 2013 to City Council and the goal of the plan was to create a district identity and sense of place within Downtown Worcester, and to identify buildings and sites that provide the primary transformation opportunities for institutional, housing, and entertainment/cultural uses, as well as the infrastructure improvements needed to support those uses. Mr. Smallridge noted The WBDC's

recent purchase of 20 Franklin Street and plans for its transformation illustrate the organization's commitment to the plan as well as the City's commitment to make the necessary improvements through its various programs and initiatives, including streetscape and parking to support the private investment efforts. Mr. Smallridge reviewed the Action Agenda for the plan and map of a mixed-use district outlining education institutions (market rate student housing, existing and proposed, commercial, residential, community and ground level retail. Mr. Smallridge noted the acquisition by the Hanover Theatre of 551 Main Street to become a mixed use building, and the CitySquare project including the parking garage and new hotel. He discussed the need for a parking garage in the area of Federal Street.

The Downtown Worcester Theatre District Master Plan presents an Action Agenda – guiding principles for the plan - then expands into more detailed plans and recommendations. The Action Agenda includes the following eight principles: Create a Mixed-Use District Anchored in Institutional Growth, showing examples of Saint Vincent Hospital and Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences; Establish an Entertainment Core Linked to Activity Centers & Open Spaces – a master plan with Federal Street Entertainment Core and links to other activity centers and open spaces; Increase Stock of Market-Rate and Student Housing – New residential developments which have introduced 430 units between 2005 and 2012, have reached full occupancy and carry a wait list and CitySquare which includes plans for housing up to 300 units; Special Opportunity Area – examples of pedestrian-focused entertainment districts that have been converted on 4th Street in Cleveland, Ohio and Louisville, Kentucky; Attract Private and Institutional Investment; Expand District Connections – previous projects included Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (academic) as well as the construction of the Gateway Park project (business innovation Center) – new projects include the rehabilitation of 20 Franklin Street and ongoing CitySquare project; Improve Pedestrian Network of Alleys and Shared Streets – by proposing assets and primary circulation routes and expand district connections – possible creation between the Library and the YWCA with a plaza created in between; Manage and Increase Parking Supply – provided aerial of existing and proposed parking garages as well as reconfigured surface lots and proposed streets for angled parking – new proposed parking in the Federal Street area; Program for Live, Work, Study and Play – Mr. Smallridge noted the current successful projects – Common/Oval events, food trucks, movies and festivals.

Mr. Smallridge focused on Federal Street as a Special Opportunity Area, as a new urban gathering space, that creates an opportunity since it is only one block long, it is identifiable, and it provides a sense of closure. The discussion on Federal Street focused on the fact that it had the potential to be a walkable center of activity but needed to be programmed in a way that allowed it to become a destination attraction over time.

Mr. Smallridge noted that these plans take time and to move forward you need to build on Worcester's historic architecture in the Theatre District and Worcester's Downtown for moving forward with the WRA Urban Revitalization Plan. Committee members discussed various scenarios to increase the footprint of the master plan adding not to leave out certain neighborhoods and historic buildings and to work off of successful plans including Gateway Park and Union Station. Questions were raised about traffic circulation and connections – how are people coming into the Downtown? What are the traffic counts? Which should come first, construction of a parking garage or redevelopment? Mr. Brissette noted that these were all good questions – and that the discussion would be left at this point to continue at the next meeting.

The next meeting will be held June 4, 2015 at 8:00 AM, hosted by Linda Cavaoli at the YWCA.

A motion was made by John Brissette and seconded by Jack Donahue to end the meeting. The meeting ended at 9:15 AM.