

Worcester Redevelopment Authority
Citizens Advisory Committee
April 30, 2015
8:00 AM
City Hall – Levi Lincoln Room
Worcester, Massachusetts

Present:

John Brissette, Chair, Frank Carroll, Linda Cavaioli, Jack Donahue, Paul Demoga, Alex Dunn, Allen Fletcher, Michelle Johnson, Alec Lopez, Mable Millner, Hong Tran,

Staff:

Michael Traynor, WRA Chief Executive Officer
Heather Gould, Chief of Staff, EOED
Jackson Restrepo, Special Project Coordinator, EOED
Jane Bresnahan, Administrative Assistant, EOED

Mr. Brissette called the meeting to order at 8:05 A.M.

1. Introduction of New Members

Mr. Brissette welcomed Allen Fletcher from the Canal District noting that two new members have been added to the Committee to represent the Canal District and the Crown Hill District.

2. Approval of Minutes

Chair Brissette asked the Committee to approve the minutes of the April 16, 2015 meeting. Mr. Demoga made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Fletcher seconded the motion.

3. Downtown/Theatre District Urban Renewal Plan

- Visioning Session

City Manager Edward Augustus thanked the Committee for allowing him to share his vision for the future of the Downtown. He acknowledged that the Urban Renewal Project is meant to build upon the success of the Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts and the creation of the Theatre District Master Plan. He then reflected upon how the downtown has evolved over the past thirty years – describing the CitySquare project and the re-opening of Front Street, re-creating the connections from Downtown to Washington Square, a vision inspired through the renovation of Union Station, the emergence of the Canal District, the announcement of a new Washington Square hotel

and the development of the Osgood Bradley Building into student housing – the development of the Osgood Bradley Building into an 82 unit, 250 bed market rate purpose built student housing complex bringing college students to the downtown core, creating a density and an energy that was lacking. Mr. Augustus noted the instrumental development of the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences under the leadership of President Charles Monahan, and the development of numerous buildings within the downtown footprint - the Regional Justice Center and Gateway Park, the Voke Lofts and the construction of a new Hampton Inn hotel. He mentioned how the City was doing its part with funding programmed for streetscape within the downtown core – on Main Street from Courthouse to Courthouse, as well as Salem, Portland, Federal, and Southbridge Streets – new sidewalks, stamped crosswalks, and lighting. He would also like to see a front entrance be added to the Library opening up to the Common as well as the creation of a tot lot between the Library and the YWCA. Urban renewal is a worthwhile program to promote redevelopment in areas struggling with disinvestment and decay. While downtown Worcester has many positive attributes - strong businesses, historic architecture, vibrant entertainment and nightlife options, it suffers from a declining building stock due to property owners unwilling or incapable of maintaining and investing in their real estate. The impact of new investment is limited by substandard properties within the area. With the right resources and the right support, a targeted urban renewal program for downtown Worcester would eliminate those pockets of blight. Mr. Augustus noted that along with MCPHS, Becker College has students living in the area, Quinsigamond Community College has 1,500 students in their Center for Workforce Development and Continuing Education on Franklin Street, and Worcester State University is also looking into space within the urban renewal area. Mr. Augustus wants the URP to be a blueprint to guide developers 5, 10, 15 years down the road – identify the disinvested properties and address them because the City and the merchants deserve better. Worcester is the second largest city in New England, let's start acting like it.

During the discussion that followed, the Committee suggested/requested that the plan might be better received by changing the word “renewal” to “revitalization.” In closing, Mr. Augustus suggested that the committee review the plan and look at it as a toolbox to identify the boundaries and the footprint of all the structures and vacant land within the plan.

Mr. Traynor advised the Committee that a presentation on the Theatre District Master Plan will be given by the consultant who drafted it, and that a copy of the Theatre District Master Plan will be emailed to the Committee. The Committee will next meet May 14, 2015 at 8:00 AM.

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