

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 20, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Maria Valle, Co-chair; Eneida Martinez; Scott Burns; Michelle Lyons.

OTHERS: Council Member(s): Aidee Nieves (6:28pm), Council President & Rolanda Smith (6:15pm); Bill Coleman, OPED Deputy Director; Vincent Mobilio, OPED Special Project Manager; Max Perez, Director of Business Development; Jonathan Delgado, Sr, Economic Developer; Edward Lavernoich, Bridgeport Development Corp.; Tyisha Toms, City Attorney; Deborah Garskof, City Attorney.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Valle called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. There was a quorum present at the time of roll call.

**INFORMATIONAL SESSION WITH OPED REGARDING UPDATE ON THE
FOLLOWING TOPICS:**

- **Capital Plan Bonded Projects**

Mr. Coleman shared they will be back in front of the committee for the budget approval. The projects in downtown were approved for \$18 million and they currently have \$5 million left to update the area.

There are bids coming for the Davidson building removal of Asbestos and fixing the current fence situation. That work is said to begin on Monday, March 25th and is estimated at \$500,000 dollars. They will be doing the same work with the McLevy Hall building, the funding is secured by two grants totaling at \$1.25 million dollars. This building is in need of masonry, roof and window repair, along with hazardous material and ADA compliance from the inside.

Council member Martinez asked how much is the total clean-up cost and isn't McLevy Hall up for sale. Mr. Coleman replied they are estimating \$1 million dollars to clean up McLevy Hall and \$500,000 dollars to clean up the Davidson Building. The city can negotiate with buyers to clean up McLevy Hall. Since they have the grants to cover the exterior work, the city would like to be

good stewards and clean up the entire location but a sale isn't promised then they will have a renovated building also available for use.

Council member Martinez asked if the property was considered historic and Mr. Coleman replied yes, they had it appraised in October of 2022 and value for the land and building was at \$2.65 million dollars.

Mr. Coleman began to share the expansion plans for the Skating and Beer Garden at the Post office Square; he mentioned the committee approved long ago for them to apply for funds. Mr. Delgado added they are utilizing the grant with the goal of activating the space by bringing in more people from the community and more newcomers. The state granted them \$2.25 million dollars for the construction and the city matched \$1.7 million dollars. They are looking to add a dog park, bathrooms, expansion of bar garden, stage and seating, and a paved space for food trucks. They are also looking at containers to fill in spaces for businesses to sell retail products. Due to the space and nonprofit business filling in the area, they want to add more retail space to allow more foot traffic.

Council member Burns asked if the containers would be a permanent or temporary space available for the businesses. Mr. Delgado replied they are still in the contract phase so they would need more time to figure that out but it will create many job opportunities. Mr. Coleman said you can look at it as an incubator space, the focus will be the event space with small shops and trucks around. Mr. Delgado added it all depends on how long everything will be in operation, some spaces can run all year. Mr. Coleman added they also have the skating program that was incubated there.

Council member Lyons asked how they would market this, they should use the community to help this grow. She added Bridgeport is lacking a visitor's guide as well. Mr. Delgado said the DSSD has walking guides and other materials but that focuses only on Downtown, as a city they need to do better promoting. Mr. Coleman added with the restaurant week they did great with promoting. Council member Lyons mentioned some people need paper guides while others need social media or can just hop on a website.

Co-chair Valle asked what is the plan and how long will it take for things to get done. Mr. Delgado replied they will be focusing on the post office square and the skating program will begin June 1st, 2024 along with the beer garden. Everything else is under contract then they will bid with designs.

****COUNCIL MEMBER SMITH JOINED THE MEETING AT 6:15 PM. ****

Council member Martinez added she loves the idea and hopes the food trucks are diverse with different foods available. She would live to see downtown Bridgeport liven up with more affordable sit down restaurants and ice cream shops.

Mr. Delgado added they have \$1.6 million from a spending bill and they are looking to add more lighting in Downtown.

****COUNCIL PRESIDENT NIEVES JOINED THE MEETING AT 6:28 PM. ****

- **Remington Arms Demolition**

Mr. Mobilio shared what is left of the Remington Arm location is the foundation, everything else has been knocked down. The second phase is to remove the foundation and back fill the location and remove remaining buildings around the shot tower which required special demolition along the side of Barnum Avenue. Some will be repairs that are along the shot tower. The demolition project is contracted at \$10 million dollars, they will begin the project in April with a timeline of 10 months to complete. Mr. Perez added the permit applications are currently in the planning and zoning office being processed to get the approval for the demolition process. In regard to the dust, noise, and traffic will all be under control.

Mr. Coleman said that is a state grant funded project receiving \$10 million dollars and the city is contributing \$500,000 thousand dollars from city capital.

Council President Nieves asked once the demolition is completed, what would be the timeline for the remediation. Mr. Coleman said it is all inclusive to the 10 month timeline. The remediation is to clean up for the next development. President Nieves asked if the agreement was to create something that was taxed commercially. Mr. Coleman agreed it was and said it will be cleaned up to commercial standard. If someone would like to purchase for mixed use, the city is only obligated to clean up for commercial use.

Co-chair Valle added when May or June comes she hopes there is no stand still. If there is a block in the way, the committee should be aware. The residents have suffered enough with the mess. Barnum Avenue is I-95 with limited traffic regulations. The fence may block the view from oncoming traffic as well. Mr. Perez said once the demolition is completed the gate will be pushed back. Co-chair Valle added in reality there needs to be a traffic sign in that area.

Mr. Perez shared they had ideas of creating it into a warehouse location for retail businesses which would create a lot of jobs for the surrounding community. Mr. Coleman added they got calls regarding the property and creating it into an office, medical and sporting space.

Council member Martinez shared she likes the idea but in regard to trucks, a city lot can clear the street from 18 wheelers parking in residential areas.

Council President Nieves added she would disagree with the warehouse idea due to the location and the already existing tractor trailer school. It would cause more accidents and traffic in the area. She finds the medical expansion more preferable as the east side is already saturated with housing. They have to consider traffic when considering developing.

Mr. Perez shared that the property owners of 304 George Street & 330 Myrtle Avenue are in court right now as both of the properties were condemned by the city. The owners ran to court to stop the demolition of 304 George Street, there is fire damage and the ruminants are all still there.

Mr. Coleman added as they were granted the right to condemn these buildings, they are in the middle of getting the property values appraised.

Council President Nieves asked when the condemnation board would meet. Mr. Perez replied every 3rd Wednesday at 1pm, which is open to the public. The OPED department, engineering, fire marshal, city attorney, building and health department are in attendance of the meetings.

Council member Burns asked the (inaudible) location, what is the time limit to condemn the building by eminent domain. Mr. Coleman said the clock ticks out on May 6th, they are waiting on the final appraisal to make their offer.

Mr. Perez went on to share that 330 Myrtle Avenue by I-95 has extreme conditions, the roof is caving in. There is a party wall on Railroad Avenue and Cherry Street that is shared with a residential building. Mr. Coleman shared that half the block has developed; there is housing, a school, and a market. Developers are looking to develop the area but in the eyes of the city they are considering demolition or remodeling just some of the building.

Council member Burns asked if they are going through SHIPO for the demolition. Mr. Coleman said it will cause the developer problems in respect to his relationship with SHIPO, he would lose his tax credit from Historic Tax revenue.

Mr. Coleman said they do not have enough money for all demolitions so they will prioritize the best they can to get the job done. Co-chair Valle said when she was in Washington there was a company there so said they have money for brownfield properties, the city would just have to apply for the grants.

- **Brownfield Remediation**

Mr. Coleman said they have been bringing in more money for the Brownfield site with private partners than the city itself. Acquiring grants would require administrative work done by the city to oversee. Working with private partners will allow the city to worry about acquiring the fund and the work, not the administrative tasks that pull a lot of time from them.

Mr. Lavernoich added in the 90's there was a study done regarding brownfield locations as a threat of properties getting redeveloped. Since the properties were not being redeveloped to maximize their capacity, costing the city over \$50 million dollars and the city would lose overall value. The city of Bridgeport was successful getting brownfield dollars but there is a lot of administrative work that pulls funds away from the actual labor of the project.

Mr. Coleman said the tale of Brownfield dollars will pay for Bridgeport Grass, a park on the east end, \$10 million dollars for the Remington site, \$8 million for the soccer field, \$4 million AGI grant, \$3.5 million cherry street, and a developer applied for \$8 million dollars for AT&T building in downtown.

Council member Martinez asked the department to share that information with the public so that the council is aware of the status and projects currently being worked on because nothing is really being heard of.

- **Congress Street Bridge**

Mr. Coleman carried on to speak on the project, there are two aspects to the project. They are currently looking for the dollars to pay for the working contract. Mr. Delgado shared back in October they were asking the committee about applying for the RCM program that granted the city to apply for two separate grant funds. One of them required a 50/50 match and the other was the typical 80/20 match. They did not receive funding from the program but they submitted another application for the Raise program on February 28,2024. They will get notice within the next 6 months; they restructured the application to have the city match more of the grant funding.

Mr. Coleman asked for anyone with key interest on this project to sit with them, they have tried to reach out to the federal government for support but no luck. Council President Nieves added they can try contacting Murphy who has helped with funding \$8 million dollars for the airport runway.

Council member Martinez shared that during election time they should not use these projects to make it seem like things will be moving forward as it alters the way people are thinking when it comes to voting.

Council President Nieves added it does make the council and city look bad when they use that propaganda and nothing gets done. She has seen project proposals and renderings for the project but nothing gets done. She mentioned they need to do better with grants and stop using bonds.

Council member Burns added they do go out to Washington and pay memberships to get access to many grant programs. We need to work on the return that we are investing in.

Mr. Delgado said they do set up monthly meetings to categorize grants that are coming up but can definitely do a better job and reach out to the other departments to collaborate.

Council President Nieves said they should create a planner to send to Washington so that everyone knows what the city needs help with. They have a lot of connections on the board and committees that they are losing opportunities on due to being quiet.

- **Seaview Avenue Corridor**

No discussion was made. Mr. Coleman asked to come back with John from Engineering to give the committee a better update. All he knows is the project is fully funded and progressing.

Co-chair Valle asked how the parking would be set up in that area. Mr. Mobilio replied the parking will be the same as on Bond Street, the parking will be parallel. Co-Chair Valle added she hopes there are also sidewalks on both sides.

Council President asked the OPED department to share their plans with the council before their funding hearing to allow everyone to learn about what's needed from the department and that will allow the council to be ready with questions.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES

- **January 17, 2024 (REGULAR MEETING)**

****COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 17, 2024.**

****COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- **February 5, 2024 (RECONVENED MEETING)**

****COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 5, 2024.**

****COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

****COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ MOTIONED TO ADJOURN.**

****COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION WAS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Vianca Rivera

Telesco Secretarial Services.