



Westfield Redevelopment Authority

03-04-25

Municipal Building, 59 Court Street, Westfield, MA Room 315

8:00 am

Members Present:

Chair Witalisz, Member Parks, Member Woodson

Members Absent:

Member Morin

Staff Present:

Peter J. Miller, Jr. (Executive Director)

Leanne Cosby (Community Development Block Grant Coordinator)

Christine Fedora (Office Manager)

Chair Witalisz called the meeting of the Westfield Redevelopment Authority (WRA) to order at 8:00 AM. The members listed above were in attendance.

1.) Roll Call

Chair Witalisz asked for a roll call:

- Member Woodson – Present
- Member Parks – Present
- Chair Witalisz – Present
- Member Morin – Absent

Also Present:

- Leanne Cosby – Community Development Block Grant Coordinator
- Peter Miller – Director of Community Development, Acting Director of Economic Development
- Christine Fedora – Office Manager

Chair Witalisz asked attendees to introduce themselves:

- Mr. Jeff Bag – BSC Group
 - Ms. Heather Gould – Director of Planning, Senior Associate, BSC Group
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2.) Approval of Minutes – November 7, 2024

Member Woodson MOTIONED, seconded by Member Parks, to approve the minutes of the November 7, 2024, meeting as submitted.

All in favor.

3.) Reports of Committees

a. WRA Financial Summary

Mr. Miller reviewed the financials. The current balance is \$55,926.52. He stated that he would be requesting a transfer of \$10,000.00 from the Council, along with an encumbrance for the \$10,000.00 match for the grant received from MassDevelopment.

He mentioned that there are plans to engage a consultant, likely PVPC, to conduct a slum and blight report on the neighborhood, which is estimated to cost between \$8,000 - \$10,000.00. This report is required to qualify the area for an urban renewal plan, which must meet the baseline criteria for a blighted neighborhood.

4.) Report of the Executive Director

Mr. Miller reported that the events that took place last summer were more traditional in nature. This year, the first event will be Run Westfield, scheduled for May 17. The plaza will serve as the primary space for the event, with the front portion of the lot allocated for vendors.

The plaza has been booked for Fridays and Saturdays in June and July.

- Saturday nights will feature dance performances by local dance studios in Westfield.
- Friday nights will host concerts sponsored by ArtWorks.

These events aim to assist downtown businesses.

Food Trucks and Alcohol Vendors:

- Food trucks will be set up in designated areas.
- Alcohol will be supplied by Tribeca and White Lyon.
- ArtWorks will manage other vendors.
- Peter will handle licensing for alcohol and food.

Other Upcoming Events:

- Art with Pride – June 21
- Cultural District Kickoff Event – June 14, with plans to hold an inaugural party to celebrate. The party will include stakeholders such as ArtWorks, WOW, Westfield Athenaeum, Theatre Group, Westfield Woman’s Club, and several local artists.

Policing for Events:

Members asked about police presence at events. Mr. Miller stated that each vendor is responsible for their own detail if alcohol is being served. The cost is \$70.00 per hour per officer, with most events requiring two officers. The city does not cover these costs except for city-sponsored events.

Additional Plans:

The Mayor is considering a Labor Day event to welcome Westfield State University students.

Events in April and May:

Chair Witalisz inquired about events planned for April and May. Mr. Miller mentioned two requests:

- A National Day of Prayer requested by a local church.
 - An Easter Sunday Service.
- However, he noted that these events might be difficult due to the need for police detail.

Turf Issue Update:

Mr. Miller reported that the turf issue has not been resolved. Schott Hathaway plans to aerate and loosen the soil, as drainage has not been adequate. If necessary, replacement would not occur until fall. Mr. Levesque to work with contractor to review specs.

Development Updates:

Mr. Miller mentioned that no one has expressed interest in building on the property yet.

5.) Discussion on Westfield Riverfront District Real Estate Technical Services Grant

MassDevelopment and BSC Group – Project Consultant

Jeff Bag – Senior Planner, South Riverfront Area

Mr. Bag presented a handout with a map highlighting key areas:

- Westfield River
- Esplanade area
- South side of Orange Street
- Southern perimeter, left side of the Greenway

- Elm Street, right side of the study area

He mentioned that they had just begun reviewing information provided by Mr. Miller and were assessing the existing conditions. Meetings with stakeholders will be held to understand any challenges property owners have faced and to identify potential impediments to future investments.

Heather Gould – Director of Planning, Senior Associate, BSC Group

Ms. Gould provided a brief background, noting that she is from Worcester and has extensive experience in downtown development and urban renewal. She has been with BSC for six years and has worked on various urban renewal projects.

She emphasized that determining the eligibility of the area involves assessing slum and blight conditions, vacancy rates, lack of redevelopment, and building and roadway conditions. This information will be incorporated into the analysis to facilitate the urban renewal plan.

Chair Witalisz Inquiry:

Chair Witalisz asked whether areas across the river should be included. Mr. Miller explained that MassDevelopment had suggested a targeted focus on the current side, as the opposite side of the river does not exhibit the same level of disinvestment.

Project Priorities:

- Pilgrim Candle is under consideration for additional projects.
- The plaza's redevelopment has significantly changed the city's landscape, creating potential for further improvements.

Summary of Prior Efforts:

- Efforts to enhance the riverfront date back to 2013, with feasibility studies conducted in 2001 and 2006.
- Private ownership in the middle section of the riverfront poses challenges.
- Consideration is being given to including gas stations, restaurants, and St. Rocco's Social Club in the project.

6.) Housing and Redevelopment Discussion

Peter Miller's Vision:

Mr. Miller envisions a livable neighborhood with people taking advantage of the bike trail and the urbanized setting. He mentioned that the WHIP City building could serve as an anchor in redevelopment efforts.

Potential Housing Projects:

Mr. Miller reviewed two responses to an RFP for downtown Elm Street:

- A 3-4 story, 60-unit apartment building with retail on the first floor.
- Developed through tax credits by TA Arch Communities and Domus.

However, retail has proven to be a challenge, and initial rental projections of \$1,800 per month have increased to \$3,300 per month due to market changes, making affordability a concern.

7.) Stakeholder Engagement and Timeline

Stakeholder Meeting and Public Event:

- Stakeholder meetings will be held in May.
- A public event will be scheduled to gather community input.

Community Outreach:

Mr. Miller mentioned that outreach had been conducted, but only a few stakeholders had committed to attending. Efforts will continue, including door-to-door outreach and sending notices once details are confirmed.

Motion to Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 9:04 AM.

APPROVED