



Westfield Redevelopment Authority Meeting

June 15, 2021

Municipal Building, 59 Court Street, Westfield, MA, Room 315
8:00 AM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

STAFF

MEMBERS ABSENST

Kathy Witalisz, Chair

Peter J. Miller, Acting Executive Director

William Parks, Vice-Chair

Christine Fedora, Office Manager

Mark Morin

Tom Woodson

1.) Roll call

Chair Witalisz called the meeting of the Westfield Redevelopment Authority to order at 8:00 am. The above members were in attendance.

Also attending: Peter Currier, Westfield News

2.) Unfinished Business

- a) Review of 2019 Elm Street Project Request for Interest documents and discussion relative to modification of said documents.

Chair Witalisz felt this meeting would be a good opportunity for brain storming to hear member's ideas, suggestions, regarding this project. She began the discussion by reviewing the previous history of the WRA in regards to the Elm Street project. She felt the WRA has an opportunity to make a decision to impact the community and should base their decision on the city's and community's needs adding the plan has to follow the Urban Renewal Plan.

Chair Witalisz showed photos of Rapid Michigan which she felt would be a good example of what Westfield might like. She felt the City should be looking at more of an anchor type of use which would bring in other businesses that would benefit from the anchor use. Should we be looking at everything and include everything into one space or should it be built out, should we be thinking big to a certain degree and make it manageable? She further reviewed some of the photos of previous and after of Rapid Michigan.

Member Morin agreed but how will it be financed and how will it make money for a developer? He realizes we want something that will enhance the corridor either a mixture between commercial and residential, but he noted we keep running against a wall where the numbers don't work.

Chair Witalisz felt the WRA should think outside of the box, to look at the whole picture. The numbers have to be broken down. She agreed the numbers will be a concern.

Mr. Woodson love to see it developed but to find the person with the vision and willing to put their funding, would the city be willing to help, there has to be a partner and there has to be a plan.

Mr. Miller noted the vision seems to be entirely of the corridor, which is outside the WRA's control, but certainly the WRA would want to help. He noted he's heard from other developers who are working on projects. The WRA has been assigned one part of the equation which is this parcel. How can we make a contribution to greater the entirety of the downtown is it by building a building that could house 100 – 250 people or is by focusing on somethsng smaller and possibly having some sort of an outdoor space? The vision has to be there, need to be a cog in the wheel as opposed to an engine, it's important to the site not to get to overwhelmed by everything else in the downtown.

Chair Witalisz felt the rest of the downtown should benefit from it as well, a building that has housing in it should be a financial draw that would bring other types of structures in the area, or by having anchors that would satisfy a void in the marketplace.

Mr. Miller stated he attended a meeting on line last regarding the Rapid Recovery Plan Program which is a program open to municipalities within the Commonwealth as part of the Baker-Polito Recovery Plan to revitalize downtowns and respond to the effects of COVID-19 on local businesses and prioritize actions and strategies. The consultants ideas to kick start the downtown after Covid was taking the existing conditions of what we have now and where we need to go to and what kind of tweaks need to be made.

The first thing that came up in Westfield is there is no anchor downtown, there is no major convention center, no corporate headquarters, no major civic anchor there. What kind of anchor could it be if it is a mixed use? Could it be a building that has small scale retail or restaurant and housing above it, could aspire to do that, if it were housing part, where would the money come from? There are subsidies available for housing to fill financial cap. Could it be a municipality use possibly a police center, or recreation center some type of a center that municipalities run?

Mr. Miller mentioned a proposal that came through they called it "Urban Farming", it's a developer who puts together a sizeable building and grows organic vegetables, they were interested in finding a space to do something along those lines. There ask was how to get contracts from city businesses to partner with them to use their produce? The concept is out there, that could be something, and it relies on other parts that aren't in the WRA control. The WRA is under control to access subsidy for housing portion of the property.

Member Woodson noted the WRA was scheduled to meet with the Council but it was cancelled due to the pandemic, could this be rescheduled so they could address the Council regarding their concerns? Mr. Miller to work to get on the Council's August agenda.

The Board discussed and decided to resubmit the RFI, it was further noted it would have to be based on the Urban Renewal Plan. Chair Witalisz also felt the numbers regarding the amount of rentals and homes available in Westfield should be mentioned in the RFI as well.

Mr. Morin in meantime suggested something be done in the area for people sit and relax. Mr. Miller noted the concert series this year will be taken out of the downtown and brought to South Middle, he felt the allure of the

concert series was that it was bringing people to the downtown area. Mr. Miller noted he would try to get something drawn up for that area to be used noting it would have to be a temporary basis.

Mr. Miller to review and broaden the language. Mr. Miller spoke with Arch and told them the direction the Authority was headed and thinking about limiting the number of units, Arch feels that lowering the numbers would be a mistake, the developer will need the scale to make it work.

Mr. Miller noted he would have it advertised on the July 14th and return by the July 26th which would give time for review on the 9-17 meeting.

Mr. Miller added he would stay silent in regards to the unit numbers. It won't be a lot of work for the people who have already submitted, he further noted he would see if there is a way to get it out to hotels and those type of things. Kathy suggested using interns from Westfield University.

Meeting adjourned at 8:58.

APPROVED