



Redevelopment Authority of Lehigh County
May 2, 2024 Meeting

The meeting of the Redevelopment Authority of Lehigh County was held at 9:00 a.m. by Zoom video conference. A recording of this meeting is available at: <https://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Community-Economic-Development/Lehigh-County-Redevelopment-Authority>.

ATTENDING

Board Members: Oscar Ghasab (OG), Ricky Gower (RG), Kent Herman (KH), David Weinstein (DW); Michael Yeager (MY). Quorum obtained. Also in attendance representing the Authority, Chris Gulotta (CG)

County Staff: Virginia Haas (VH), Cyndi King (CK)

Public Guests: None

ABSENT

Frank Kane (FK), Steve Neratko (SN)

AGENDA ITEMS

CALL TO ORDER at 9:03 a.m. by MY

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS – None.

Review and Approval of Minutes of April 4, 2024 Meeting

No questions or concerns; motion for approval made by DW; seconded by RG. Minutes approved.

Financial Report and Approval of Bills – See Tab B

Three bills: The Gulotta Group \$1,960.65, Kings Spry \$561.00, Zelenkofske Axelrod \$800.00 totaling \$3,321.65. Catasauqua will be billed for \$125.00 thereby

reimbursing that amount for CG's services on the Ironworks Project. CG shared the details of these bills with MY & OG who were satisfied with those details. No additional questions or comments. OG made a motion to accept the bills brought forward for payment; motion was seconded by DW. Three bills unanimously approved for payment. CG read through the financial statement of 3/1/24 through 3/31/24 of cash assets \$128,335.92, revenue received from County of Lehigh's appropriation \$25,000.00, reimbursement from Catasauqua of \$596.05 and monthly interest income. Monthly expenditures were \$1,736.17 for The Gulotta Group contract service and \$450.00 for PHARA conference registration for CG bringing total expenditures for the month to \$2,186.17. Year-to-date fund balance is \$128,335.92. No questions or comments.

OLD BUSINESS – None

STATUS REPORTS - Executive Director's Report - See Tab C

IRONWORKS PROJECT

Proposals are due on 6/10/24. CG and Catasauqua's consultant have been contacting the firms that obtained the RFP. CG sees interest taken in the project and will gauge the magnitude of that interest in the coming week and will provide the Board with an update via email. For the benefit of the other board members, MY asked CG whether the "environmental exposures" were more than originally anticipated. CG responded that there is always the perception that this [aspect of a project] could be troublesome. After no proposals were received in January, Catasauqua had research performed and the site will be capped with two-feet of fill. While that does not sound like a lot [when one considers] two-feet over ten acres [this translates into] a couple million dollars. Perhaps this is having a chilling effect on companies when they begin to actually crunch the numbers and it is a cost which firms don't have when developing other sites. CG hopes that being a waterfront property will off-set this. Waterfront sites are not "a dime a dozen". The site includes some storm water benefits as in there is no need to retain storm water there; approval was received from the Conservation District to allow storm water into the canal. Another positive aspect to this site is that the land is inexpensively available due to the purchase price being reduced by almost half. CG answered MY that "environmental exposures" could be factoring in. No further questions on the Ironworks project.

MULTI-MUNICIPAL STATE GRANT "Blight-To-Bright"

CG notified the three municipalities (Catasauqua, Whitehall, and North Whitehall) of the funds availability in February. CG provided North Whitehall with a funding

agreement which had been reviewed by KH and which contained additional information to meet with County of Lehigh's requirements. CG set a deadline of 5/24/24 for the three municipalities to notify him of their interest. The municipality can not use this funding to acquire properties and demolish them; this funding may only be used for demolition of properties which have been cited as unsafe for human habitation and which have gone through an entire process outlined in the municipal property maintenance codes which allows for demolition of the property even though the municipality does not own the property. In addition, there are other stipulations to use of the funding. One stipulation is the requirement of a Tier 2 Environmental Review (ERR) for HUD that involves completing an environmental checklist for each property to be demolished comprised in part of on-line consultation with the state Historic Preservation Office, researching the property's proximity to environmental conditions by review of on-line databases, and confirming that the property is not located in a flood plain. CG has been in contact with a consulting firm, Mullin & Lonergan Associates, Inc. with which he has had extensive prior collaboration experience. Mullin & Lonergan will provide the Tier 2 ERR for \$400.00 per property. CG estimates between four and six properties would require the use of the consultant. CG would like to remain focused on bigger projects for the RALC such as growing the revenue base so as a cost-effective measure, he requests board approval to contract Mullin & Lonergan Associates, Inc. to produce the Tier 2 ERRs. MY noted that the RALC must pay someone to produce the required ERRs and secondly, he would like to see the diligent work of the RALC rewarded by assisting municipalities in remedying blighted property issues. MY is in favor of hiring the consultant. KH has worked with this proposed consultant and he concurs with CG that Mullin & Lonergan are reliable and professional. In terms of procurement, because it is professional services, the quantity or the dollar amount of contract does not raise any procurement requirements. RG agrees with MY in expending a nominal cost to free time on smaller efforts and for CG to continue to make progress on larger projects while the consultant complies with HUD-required ERRs in CDBG funding. DW and OG agree with the others. OG made a motion to use this third-party intermediary for the environmental studies which was seconded by RG. Unanimous voice vote in favor; motion passes.

CG noted that he also applied for the 2024 CDBG grant with Lehigh County for \$75,000.00 which award notifications take place during the summer. CG emailed information about "blight" under state law to the board last month. It is CG's intent to provide the board with background information about the issue of blight and specific information about blight in Lehigh County. CG asked for any questions on the material he forwarded; there were no questions.

CG wrote up notes from the April strategic planning session which is attached to the Executive Director report in the May board packet. CG asked for thoughts or comments. MY thought CG did a wonderful job summarizing the discussion from last month's board meeting and in putting the review of that discussion together. MY asked "where [does the RALC] go from here?" CG replied that the strategic plan document is not yet completed. Now that the RALC has a mission statement, the RALC has some strategic directions from Strategic Weaknesses Opportunities & Threats analyses, CG will follow those up with a draft action plan for the board. The board unanimously agreed for CG to move forward with creating the step-by-step action plan.

MISCELLANEOUS

Update on demolition at the former Lehigh Valley Dairy site. It is generally agreed that the RALC will not act on a funding agreement with Elias Property Group until a commitment letter has been received from the state. Once that document is received, the RALC will draw up a funding agreement to provide some funding to that group for Phase 2 Environmental which will require solicitation of a total of three proposals before the contract can be awarded. DW confirmed that demolition is in progress at the site. No demolition is being done at the site adjacent to the rear of the dairy which is owned by a different group.

RESOLUTIONS – None

EXECUTIVE SESSION - None

NEW BUSINESS

MY asked how the visit to Emmaus council meeting went. CG went to that meeting on 4/1/24 where he briefed them on the RALC capabilities and he made the point that the RALC can be a partner in municipal redevelopment ventures to the extent there is municipal-owned property which the municipality does not want to have to sell to the highest bidder and going through the RFP process with the RALC can avert that situation.

COMMENTS OR ANNOUNCEMENTS

Next regular meeting is June 13, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom. The proposals for the Ironworks project will be received by that time. The advisory committee comprised of MY, KH, and CG, will convene to meet with representatives from

Catasauqua Borough, who are also part of that advisory committee, to view the proposals using the criteria in the RFP and then make a recommendation to the RALC board. There is a provision to interview any of those firms and then having the preferred developer give a public presentation on what they are proposing. CG will send the board an email on June 10 letting them know what proposals came in but no decision will be made at the June 13 meeting because there is a strong possibility that the advisory committee will not have yet met.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS - None

MY called for questions or comments from the board; there were none. MY entertained a motion by RG and seconded by DW to adjourn the meeting. Unanimous voice approval; meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia L. King