



TOWN OF WARE

Planning & Community Development

126 Main Street, Ware, Massachusetts 01082

t. 413.967.9648 ext. 120

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Meeting Minutes from

Monday, September 12th, 2022

Select Board Room, Town Hall

CDA Members Present:

Danielle Souza, Chair (remote)
John Carroll
Tiffany Menard
Rhiannon Gresty
S.K. "Rob" Robinson

CDA Members Absent:

Brandy Brusco

Public:

Staff Present:

Rob Watchilla, PCD Director
Kristen Jacobsen, PCD Admin.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIENCE

Chair D. Souza called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Approval of Meeting Minutes from July 11, 2022 meeting

Motion made by J. Carroll to approve the meeting minutes from July 11, 2022. Seconded by D. Souza.

D. Souza	Aye
J. Carroll	Aye
R. Gresty	Aye
S. Robinson	Aye

All in Favor. Approved 4/0/0.

REVIEW OF FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS

Review of Financial Accounts

R. Gresty inquired about the number of first time home buyer accounts. R. Watchilla and D. Souza confirmed there were 2. Originally there were 3 accounts however, due to one of the lenders not accepting it, 2 accounts remain. D. Souza stated the attorney sent back the check and the funds are back in the account.

R. Watchilla reviewed the Housing Rehab Loan account. He stated the current balance as of August 31, 2022 is \$19,000.00 which is due to a \$12,000.00 loan payout. R. Watchilla advised the committee that if

the amount rose above \$30,000.00 before March, 31 2023 anything that remains would go to program income account.

D. Souza inquired if the overage could be used to do another first-time homebuyer.

D. Souza asked if any other members had questions about the financials

Updates

CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) UPDATES (Tiffany Menard)

FY20: Bank Street

T. Menard informed the CDA that work on Bank Street has been completed for approximately 2 months and the final payment was made the week prior to this meeting. T. Menard did state that there were just some loose ends to be tied up

FY20CV: Social Services & Microenterprises

T. Menard stated she believed it was finished.

FY2021: Façade Improvement Program

D. Souza asked how the façade program was going. R. Watchilla and T. Menard answered that as of September 12, 2022 there has not been any applications.

R. Watchilla suggested doing outreach to the business owners on Main Street.

D. Souza agreed that outreach would be a good way to determine if the business owners were having any issues with the applications or if they had objections.

R. Gresty inquired if anyone had seen the applications yet

D. Souza proposed setting aside time to meet with business owners and assist them with the application.

R. Watchilla recommended handing out the flyers and also doing as D. Souza had suggested.

R. Watchilla stated he had gotten a few calls asking about the program however, the projects the business owners proposed were not applicable to the program.

D. Souza inquired as to what the projects were. R. Watchilla stated one was for the mill yard and the owner asked about a project they currently had in progress.

D. Souza asked what would happen if they did not have a program and if the funds were not used. R. Watchilla answered stating the application window could be extended and further increase out outreach efforts.

T. Menard suggested they could ask to have the money reprogrammed which is a situation they are running into with Bank Street.

J. Carroll asked if there was money left over from Bank Street. T. Menard stated there was a portion of work that grant funds could not be used for.

D. Souza asked T. Menard if she knew how much of the funds were left. T. Menard answered that there was approximately \$45,000.00 minus \$15,000.00.

R. Watchilla added that he and K. Jacobsen will hand out the flyers to the business owners on Main Street as well as print out several to be taken by D. Souza to Ware BCA.

T. Menard stated Tighe & Bond has been chosen for the Cottage St. Project. R. Watchilla added that there had been two bids with Tighe & Bonds price coming in significantly less.

New Business

R. Watchilla directed board members to look over the last two pages of the packet which contains a list of project ideas.

R. Watchilla stated more signage is on the way for West Street from the Shared Streets and Spaces grant the town received. The grant will include pedestrian signs, wayfinding signs, and park benches to be placed down the corridor.

R. Watchilla spoke of the community pool, and they are looking to do park grants for that project. He suspected the project would cost at least 1-million dollars. J. Carroll surmised it would cost between 2-3 million dollars.

D. Souza asked if Ware was a lead community for 2023. R. Watchilla asked if it was a joint application this time. T. Menard answered she was not sure and that it may depend on what the projects are. D. Souza inquired if the lead position alternated each year. The board discussed whether Ware would receive the larger amount this year. R. Watchilla said that since the Cottage Street project for this year it could receive attention next year, but the board could also look into another project they would like to pursue.

R. Watchilla considered choosing a top three or five to consider. The parking lot of the dog park is one he said residents are unhappy with. R. Watchilla added that the parking lot needs to be regraded and repaved since it overloads one of the storm drains and creates flooding during heavy rain. He also suggested redesigning the parking lot to incorporate more trees and islands.

J. Carroll advised to be careful when adding islands to the parking lot so as not to make it too difficult for the plows.

D. Souza stated many members of the community use the parking lot for the apartments.

R. Watchilla stated he spoke with Geoff McAlmond of the DPW and he said an island down the center with an additional break would not be too bad.

D. Souza stated the list of potential projects was developed by stakeholders in the community.

R. Watchilla added that there were smaller projects such as the community garden and left over funds could be used for that as well.

D. Souza added that for 2022 the board should look for some larger projects.

R. Watchilla spoke stating the pricing he had received for the dog park last winter was around \$50,000.00 to \$60,000.00. He added that the pricing would have likely gone up by now

D. Souza inquired about the space next to Veterans Park and the plan to install a bench or something to make it look nice. She also inquired about the installation of lighting in that area. R. Watchilla said the Downtown Improvement Committee was looking at funding options for that project.

T. Menard stated the funding had increased to \$1.35 million for the next grant cycle.

R. Gresty inquired about the Crosswalk signs. R. Watchilla stated they received funding through a grant to do the pedestrian crossing signs along West Street and also park benches. He stated that they received the funding to do about 16 signs and are looking at getting the solar powered ones that have blinking lights. D. Souza asked where the benches would be placed. R. Watchilla responded that there would be a few at Veterans Park, some on West Street, and maybe some in downtown. He stated they are looking to get the input of the residents on where they'd like to put them.

J. Carroll stated there used to be benches on Main Street, but people sat on them all day long, kids hung around, and it wasn't very attractive. Elderly and other people complained. R. Robinson asked how long ago that had been. J. Carroll answered that it had been 30 years ago when he had served on the Police force. J. Carroll continued by stating that's why the benches were removed.

J. Carroll suggested adding benches to the bus stop. D. Souza proposed the possibility of a bench with an overhang and maybe a sign. D. Souza asked if this could be added to the list. The board discussed the possibilities of adding benches to the different bus stops in town.

D. Souza stated Caitlin had been spear heading the Youth Center Project. J. Carroll added that the Armory is now vacant. He added that S. Beckley would need to contact our state senator.

D. Souza added that she felt the town could really use a Y.M.C.A.. J. Carroll recalled meeting with them and that the Y.M.C.A. did not have any interest. D. Souza responded that space had been an issue at that time. The board discussed the possibilities of where the Police Station may move and what buildings could potentially be used for a youth center.

R. Robinson inquired about the section 'filling vacant properties. R. Watchilla responded that the purpose was to find possible tenants, owners, and people to fill the vacant store fronts along Main Street and the surrounding downtown area. R. Roberts asked if it was mainly commercial projects. R. Watchilla responded by confirming and adding the private realm is also a consideration. R. Watchilla continued by saying it could go beyond commercial projects such as a vacant lot could be activated for community space. R. Watchilla continued stating we are still working on our vacant inventory but it had been at a standstill for the time being.

R. Robinson added property that could be used for the purposes of research and recruitment of commercial actors to fill vacancies. R. Watchilla asked if he had proposed an incubator or maker's space. R. Robinson stated that if one were to check the MLS system there is a wealth of vacant commercial space available and would it be possible to use grant funds to recruit people into those spaces which might stimulate economic activity in town. R. Watchilla responded saying that if we were to design a program

to hire people to do that specifically to benefit the community that could work. D. Souza added that we have the opportunity zone. She continued by saying that the large building on Main Street is vacant because of sprinklers and asked if he was speaking of just the downtown district. R. Robinson stated he was viewing the total number of vacant properties and brought up the Wicked Wings Building saying it would be good to get a business in there. D. Souza responded that business owners she had spoken with stated the price of the building was high.

D. Souza stated she had written a letter of support when someone was looking at bringing in a community space where they could do home buying education and things of that nature. R. Watchilla proposed the possibility of getting an educational program in that could focus on the next group of commercial business owners.

D. Souza asked if that was what R. Roberts was hoping to achieve. R. Robinson stated yes that was one thing, but he was also wondering if we could use the funds to recruit investors. D. Souza asked if he was looking to use the funds to hire someone whose focus would be on investor outreach. R. Robinson responded that it would make sense to do so.

D. Souza stated that the BCA is supporting commercial investors to come in and invest in the community. The asset sheet had been presented to investors and commercial business owners. R. Watchilla added he had made site cards for the vacant properties in town which contained information about the seller of the property and anything you'd need to know about it.

D. Souza said if money had been spent on that program, we should utilize it. She asked if R. Robinson wanted to see that data and he confirmed he would.

J. Carroll asked inquired about the sprinkler system in Balicki building and if it would be possible to look at grants or funding to help with that. R. Watchilla responded that the owner of the building had applied for a grant for that and was waiting for a response. J. Carroll also inquired about the possibility of downsizing the space used in the building so that the upgrades to the sprinkler system weren't needed. R. Watchilla stated the owner had plans done and had an architect and someone who designs sprinkler systems and was ready to begin the project as soon as the money was available.

D. Souza proposed that shared workspace is something the community needs. A space for people who need internet, a high-end printer, or a meeting area. She stated she has also heard of a need for a shared commercial kitchen space.

R. Watchilla stated he would bring the site cards to the following meeting. D. Souza suggested a spreadsheet inventory of vacant buildings.

D. Souza stated that she had a conversation with an investor of Cedarbrook and the investor felt that downtown Ware needed multi use buildings, commercial spaces with residential spaces above. D. Souza agreed with his statement and felt that people want green spaces where they can walk.

J. Carroll proposed bringing the outlets back into the mill. He stated that people come from Springfield and Chicopee to visit the Ware Walmart and wondered what could be done to coax them into the downtown area. D. Souza agreed and proposed signage to direct people toward the downtown area and getting people to invest in the Mill Yard.

R. Robinson volunteered to research what the monies can be used for in hopes that it would facilitate the discussion of what projects the board would like to accomplish.

D. Souza inquired what the application date of 2022 would be. T. Menard stated she believed it was due March 31, 2023.

R. Watchilla asked R. Robinson what he could do to facilitate his research. R. Robinson replied that he will share his research and they can go from there.

D. Souza asked if they could check and see who the lead for this year would be. T. Menard stated in the past the goal for towns going in on it together was that they would get more points that way but that was no longer the case. D. Souza asked if the money was allotted based on need. T. Menard answered yes.

T. Menard asked the board if housing was something they would like to do more of in this next cycle. D. Souza asked if that meant opening up the Housing Rehab to more individuals and asked how many people were on the waiting list. R. Watchilla said it was at least 7 or 8 people and stated the board may want to look at expanding that funding.

ADJOURN

Motion made by D. Souza to adjourn meeting at 7:34 pm. Seconded by R. Robinson.

D. Souza Aye
J. Carroll Aye
R. Gresty Aye
R. Robinson Aye
All in favor. Approved 3/0/2.

NEXT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY MEETING DATE

The next Community Development Authority meeting will be held Monday, October 17th, 2022, at 6:30 pm.

Minutes from September 12th, 2022
Respectfully submitted by,

Kristen Jacobsen
Admin
Planning & Community Development

Minutes Approved on: _____

Souza _____

Carroll _____

Bruso _____

Robinson _____

Gresty _____