



Redevelopment Authority of Lehigh County
November 2, 2023 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), Steve Neratko (SN), Michael Yeager (MY).

Also attending representing the Authority, Chris Gulotta (CG) and Kent Herman (KH)

County Staff: Frank Kane (FK), Cyndi King (CK)

Steve Althouse, WFMZ

Glenn Epps, Express Times

ABSENT

Virginia Haas (VH), David Weinstein (DW)

AGENDA ITEMS

CALL TO ORDER at 9:00 a.m. by MY

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS – None

Review and Approval of Minutes of October 5, 2023 Meeting

No questions or concerns; motion for approval made by RG; second by OG. Minutes approved.

Financial Report and Approval of Bills

CG received and forwarded the September financial statement from Jeff Weiss, Zelenkofske Axelrod, LLC, showing total assets of \$119,916.19 with no liabilities so the fund balance remains \$119,916.19. Revenue remains from the \$134,050.00 Lehigh County grant with interest income of \$292.36 totaling \$134,342.36. Expenses to date are contract services for Executive Director services \$8592.67, insurances \$3,666.00 and legal fees \$2167.50 bringing

total expenditures to date to \$14,426.17. CG reported that the Borough of Catasauqua will reimburse RALC for some of the contract service expenses and legal fee expenses pursuant to the Memo of Understanding (MOU) with them to the extent which CG and KH have worked with them on the Iron Works Request For Proposal (RFP) process subsequent to the MOU which was approved by Borough council on September 18, 2023. CG will put those numbers together and invoice the Borough. Tab B reflects “Bills For Payment” which invoiced details have been forwarded to MY and OG both of whom signed off on their approvals for these invoices from King Spry \$1,258.00 and The Gulotta Group \$2,265.91 both totaling \$ 3,523.91. OG made a motion to approve both bills as presented for payment; SN seconded. Unanimous voice vote of approval to pay both bills.

OLD BUSINESS – None

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

IRONWORKS PROJECT

Final draft of the RFP has been reviewed and approved by the advisory committee consisting of KH, MY, CG, Catasauqua Borough manager, three borough council members, borough solicitor, and their engineering consultant. CG believes it to be a strong RFP; in excess of ten developers have already expressed an interest. CG has created an interest list from which notices will be sent along with a number of other interested party contacts to discover if they are interested in receiving the RFP. CG thanked Lehigh County for the administrative support associated with the issuance of the RFP. CK will send notices to the parties who have expressed interest in receiving the RFP. CK also made arrangements to publish the notice in the legal section of the Morning Call on Sunday, November 5. CG will send out the press releases to the media. Without being presumptuous, CG stated it was assumed in his comments that the Board would approve the issuance of the RFP.

MULTI-MUNICIPAL STATE GRANT “Blight-To-Bright”

CG reported the \$500,000 state grant application was electronically submitted on August 30. He hopes to hear something by year’s end and is cautiously optimistic that it will be something positive.

OUTREACH TO COMMUNITIES

CG shared some thoughts on possible outreach to partners, stakeholders, and other organizations making them aware of ways the RALC can be helpful in redevelopment of blighted properties. Projected implementation of this outreach plan is the first of the year. Suggested ideas are an email blast every-other-month that would be sent to municipalities and possible partner organizations about the work of the RALC. Possible partner organizations include L.V. Planning Commission, Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation, Community Action Lehigh Valley, Lehigh County Department of Community & Economic Development (LCDCED), and the Lehigh County Housing Authority. CG stressed that he is open to other ideas of organizations that RALC should be communicating with if it is decided to implement the email blast idea. Secondly, over a period of 1-to-2 years, CG would like to have attended a municipal meeting of every municipality in Lehigh County. Drawing on his many years of experience as an Executive Director in Cumberland County Redevelopment and Housing Authorities, CG recounted that one of the keys to success with municipalities is the relationship building. Finally, CG would like to plan for a (possible) fall 2024 county-wide blight summit in cooperation with LCDCED. Given the work that has been done by Lehigh County with the development of the blight strategy since 2017, CG feels there is a good story to be told. A blight summit would provide the opportunity to tell that story but also would afford the opportunity to share information about RALC and other useful blighted properties information for municipalities. His thought is to have guest speakers on the topics of their successes in addressing blight. As a guest speaker example, CG might invite Bucks County Department of Community & Economic Development to discuss a project he helped develop creating an online blight inventory tool with the idea that municipalities could enter blighted properties into an inventory thereby creating a good database to use when formulating funding applications and also when working with municipalities to formulate strategies to address those properties.

MY asked for comments or concerns on the Executive Director report.

KH offered kudos to Lehigh County and CG because the Catasauqua Project had been stymied since 2014 and, over the course of RALC's reconstitution and primarily through CG's leadership, has gotten the project to a point that had not previously been reached. KH's observation is that CG has done an exemplary job of moving this project to the point which it is currently at and did so in a relatively short period of time. MY concurred and appreciated those comments. MY added how he, too, sensed the Borough of Catasauqua's appreciation for the speed with which CG and the RALC were able to bring [the ideas for the development of the site] to fruition and how excited they are for the RFPs to be [distributed and received].

For the benefit of some of the press being at the RALC meeting for the first time, FK mentioned that the County of Lehigh is extremely pleased with [the projects being developed by the RALC] along with CG's leadership and ideas on finding ways to fund projects and create income without using taxpayer money. FK went on to say that the RALC has exceeded the County's initial expectation to serve constituent municipalities.

There being no other comments or concerns, the meeting continued.

RESOLUTIONS – None

EXECUTIVE SESSION - None

NEW BUSINESS

Approval of Request for Proposals – Iron Works Redevelopment Project

MY reminded the Board that everyone received the final version of the RFP which the advisory committee had already approved and that the Board had been given the opportunity to review the same. MY commented that CG did a wonderful job of putting together the RFP packet. CG thanked the RALC and FK for the positive feedback on his work; he also appreciates the support he receives from the Board and the County in his work. CG enjoys working on public-private partnerships between municipalities and private developers; he is pleased to provide his expertise to help the project along.

Quick highlights of the RFP: Proposals are due on January 12, 2024. That date was arrived at because conceptual development plans are required and typically those plans take time to develop. Financial projections in terms of development budget as well as the operating budget also take time. A pre-proposal meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 14, at 1:00 p.m. at the Borough office for any respondents to the notice. When CK is contacted by a developer requesting the RFP, she will email them the RFP. CG hopes for many firms to be interested in learning more about this project. Essentially, the RALC is facilitating the transfer of property to an entity that is interested in completing a mixed-use development project compatible with the Borough's existing municipal building and [adhering to] the Borough's objectives for this property. The RFP goes into detail describing the property, the Borough's vision and goals for the property; along with the roles of the Borough, the RALC, and the developer, and the process for identifying a preferred developer and instructions for submitting a proposal. The Borough has laid the groundwork for this by updating their zoning ordinance; they created a new waterfront zoning district that is flexible and allows mixed uses of commercial, retail, and residential along with having made changes by traffic improvements. The Borough has moved the project along by dealing with environmental issues and also the demolition of structures while also obtaining funding in excess of \$2,000,000.00 that will be used for improvements. These funds could be made available to the developer to construct public improvements such as streets and roads, sidewalks, and other improvement related to the development of the project. The Borough did a master plan in 2014 and has a number of objectives. Shortly after acquiring this property and developing that master plan, the Borough set a number of objectives relating to employment opportunities, residential market-rate housing opportunities, and to the maximum extent possible, historical preservation of aspects of the property, and incorporating

public open spaces. All of these objectives are points to stay focused on as the Board reviews the proposals. The RFP contains a lot of detail on what the RALC is requesting from interested firms including experience, background, and track record. CG has found when working on projects such as this that [a firm's] track record is highly important. The RFP requests a conceptual development plan, a timeline for redeveloping the property, a marketing plan proposing those housing and retail/commercial components, and how they plan to manage the development after it is built. The RFP asks the developer to talk about public benefits and to quantify some of those benefits in terms of real estate tax revenue and job creation. The proposal should also include a project budget, operating pro forma, and information on the financial capacity of the developer. Going forward, the advisory committee will review and recommend the best proposal to the RALC. Ultimately, the RALC will make the final decision but it will be guided by the thoughts of the advisory committee. The ranking criteria is on page 14 of the RFP. Proposals will be received on January 12. There may possibly be interviews of firms. CG hopes to identify a preferred developer on or about February 15, 2024. CG admits it is an aggressive schedule and while it remains the target, it may slip a little bit. He hopes to have an executed exclusive negotiating agreement with the preferred developer on or about March 1, 2024 and then an agreement of sale with that developer (disposition and development agreement) by the end of the second quarter of 2024. CG believes [the project] will expeditiously proceed from here on in. He opened the floor to questions. MY asked for questions or comments and hearing none asked KH whether he had anything for the good of the order. KH said that he reviewed the RFP and attended the meetings and in KH's legal opinion, everything is in legal order for projected approval. MY continued that, with the approval of RALC solicitor and approval by the advisory committee, a motion for approval of the Request For Proposals for the Catasauqua Iron Works Redevelopment Project be called. RG made the motion; seconded by SN. The motion unanimously passed. MY asked CG to notify the Borough of Catasauqua that RALC has approved the RFP. CG stated that the RFP notice would appear in the legal section of Sunday's Morning Call.

COMMENTS OR ANNOUNCEMENTS - None

PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS – None

MY asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. SN made the motion; seconded by RG. Motion passed by unanimous voice approval.

Next regular meeting is December 7, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia L. King