



Redevelopment Authority of Lehigh County
April 4, 2024 Meeting

The meeting of the Redevelopment Authority of Lehigh County was held at 9:00 a.m. in Room #436 of the Lehigh County Government Center. A recording of this meeting is available at <https://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Community-Economic-Development/Redevelopment-Authority-of-Lehigh-County>

ATTENDING

Board Members: Oscar Ghasab (OG), Ricky Gower (RG), David Weinstein (DW); Michael Yeager (MY). Quorum obtained.

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

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

Public Guests: None

ABSENT

Steve Neratko (SN)

AGENDA ITEMS

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

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS – None.

Review and Approval of Minutes of March 7, 2024 Meeting

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

Financial Report and Approval of Bills – See Tab B

Three bills for the month: The Gulotta Group \$2,851.92 – see footnote of \$971.05

reimbursement from Catasauqua Borough for CG's time spent on Iron Works Project. \$1,117.95 advanced costs by CG for predominantly newspaper advertising of \$817.81. The newspaper balked at extending credit to the RALC unless a credit application was submitted along with a personal guarantor. CG and MY conferred and if the Board has no objection, CG will continue to use his American Express card and later be reimbursed by the RALC for advertising costs. The Board agreed. CG added a RALC phone number to his Verizon account at a cost for three months (Dec-Feb) in the amount of \$239.54. CG estimates that the bill will be about \$150/quarter moving forward, and lastly \$60.60 advanced for the purchase of envelopes. King Spry invoice for \$1,615.00 with \$357.00 being reimbursed by Catasauqua for legal counsel for the Iron Works Project. \$800.00 by Zelenkofske Axelrod, LLC for monthly accounting fee. As per protocol, CG provided all back-up documentation to MY and OG. MY called for approval to pay said bills. OG made the motion; seconded by DW. Unanimous voice vote to approve payment of three bills. CG expressed his pleasure with the timeliness of Catasauqua's payments. CG sends the bills to the borough manager who acknowledges receipt and within a few weeks a check is received which is then forwarded to OG who prepares the deposit. CG also mentioned that Zelenkofske Axelrod is very good to work with in that Jeff Weiss, CG, and OG have a good routine in terms of OG supplying Zelenkofske Axelrod with what they need to prepare the RALC financials. Also, they prepared 1099s for themselves, CG and KH at no cost.

The financial statement for the month ending February 29 is included in Tab B. Next month's statement will include the 2024 appropriation from the County of Lehigh for \$25,000. MY asked for questions of CG relative to the financial statement. There were no questions.

OLD BUSINESS – None

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

IRONWORKS PROJECT

Twelve firms requested the reissued RFP with several attending the preproposal conference. CG plans to talk with the firms prior to the June 10 deadline to ensure that the RALC receives at least three-to-four proposals by the deadline. CG intends to stay in touch with these firms to see whether they are working on elevation plans and site plans which require investments of time which would be a signal the firm plans to submit a proposal. MY noticed Catasauqua had a change

to their police chief and also that they were changing traffic on Front Street to two-way. MY questioned whether these things might impact the Iron Works Project. CG does not see this substantially impacting this project. CG believes Front Street in Catasauqua is not a state road so the borough would not need Penn DOT input. CG states there will be two sites of egress for the site: Willow Street and Bridge Street. CG spoke with the borough manager about the decision to go to two-way on Front Street. The cartway narrows through that area and it becomes tight for service vehicles which ties up traffic and impacts local business parking.

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

Lehigh County has provided the RALC Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for demolition activities. North Whitehall and Catasauqua have indicated they are interested. KH reviewed the North Whitehall documents which were then revised and which will be returned to KH for another review. CG clarified that CDBG funds will not be used by RALC to acquire properties or to demolish properties. Municipalities, under the property maintenance code, give a citation to a property owner who has not taken corrective action. If the problems persist and the structure becomes dangerous and/or unsafe and if the owner has not been responsive to code citations, the property maintenance code allows for the municipality to demolish the structure and lien the property for the amount of the demolition. This is the way to get this type of issue resolved when the owner is not responsive. RALC’s role in this process is to make certain that the County receives all the documentation it requires which is specifically outlined in the subrecipient grant agreement and is very strict in terms of bidding requirements. The municipality submits the bidding documents through the RALC which submits to the County which, in turn, reviews all documentation prior to authorizing municipal work to begin. Afterward, the municipality invoices the RALC which invoices the County for payment funded by the CDBG grant. The RALC is the conduit for funding to the municipality. CG is hopeful to receive state funding to expand the RALC program. DW asked how the lien on the property is satisfied. CG replied when the municipality is paid back, it is pro-rated so the municipality puts up matching funds to the RALC CDBG funds; the lien proceeds related to the CDBG funds will go back to the County but the County then plans to make the funds available to the RALC for future projects.

MISCELLANEOUS

CG attended the Congress of Government (COG) meeting on March 13 and talked about how the RALC can partner with municipalities on a variety of potential projects. CG said the Catasauqua Iron Works Project is a model of how the RALC

can work with a municipality to repurpose a property consistent with local objectives rather than simply selling a project to the highest bidder. RALC can help to move surplus properties. CG also spoke with Becky Bradley of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission who will meet with him after they move into their new offices. FK acknowledged CG's contribution at the COG meeting and offered to move his future presentations more toward the headline spot after RALC has a success or two to report; it may stir more interest from the municipality representatives.

CG met with Lehigh Valley Development Corporation (LVEDC) where he explained the capabilities of the RALC and where it could add value in forging public-private partnerships.

CG spoke briefly about the Legislative Report provided by Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania. The Senate Bill 802 would create a blight remediation fund for redevelopment authorities offering low interest loans, "patient" repayment along with an obligation to get the money back. CG commented that the SB 802 has been in the House since last summer and he does not know whether the dynamics of the legislature at this point in time are contributing to its languishing there.

Finally, CG followed up the previous meeting's report on a property in Whitehall wherein he confirmed with the municipal office that a permit for demolition has been submitted.

KH offered explanation as to how RALC previously satisfying a \$150,000 loan for East Penn Place, an affordable housing development in Emmaus, has allowed that project to continue as affordable housing. The Authority's action allowed the project to proceed with refinancing which will decrease the monthly debt service and provide resources to do much needed building repairs and maintenance.

MY asked for additional questions or comments on CG's report; there being none, MY referred back to the agenda.

RESOLUTIONS – None

EXECUTIVE SESSION - None

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion ensued about board member attendance. FK suggested that as long as achieving quorum for each meeting is obtained until the end of the term at the end of this year, no further action be pursued. The Board agreed.

June meeting will be rescheduled to June 13 at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom. July meeting is also rescheduled to July 11 at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom. CG will advertise the changes in the newspaper as required by the Sunshine Law.

CG suggested the RALC apply for \$75,000 of 2024 CDBG funding for municipal demolition of blighted properties. MY called for a motion to submit the application; DW made the motion and RG seconded it. Unanimous voice vote. CG will apply on behalf of the RALC by April 15.

CG and the Board moved forward with strategic planning by CG posing questions (provided to the Board before the meeting) and the Board responding. CG will try to have a draft document prepared for the next RALC meeting.

COMMENTS OR ANNOUNCEMENTS – None

PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS - None

Next regular meeting is May 2, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom. MY asked for questions or comments. There being none, he asked for a motion to close the meeting. DW made the motion to adjourn; seconded by RG. Unanimous voice vote. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia L. King