

**APPROVED MINUTES  
PLYMOUTH HOUSING AND REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
August 27, 2020**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chair Michelle Soderberg, Commissioners, Robert Huddleston, and Aqueelah Whitfield.

**ABSENT:** Commissioners Jeff Kulaszewicz and Lucas Larson

**STAFF PRESENT:** HRA Executive Director Steve Juetten, HRA Manager Jim Barnes, Community Development Coordinator Matt Lupini, Support Services Manager Denise Whalen, and Permit Technician Michelle Bast.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Council Member Jim Davis, Cathy Capone Bennett of Bennett Community Consulting, and Barbara Zadeh of Mobarta Homes, LLC

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Soderberg called the Plymouth Housing and Redevelopment Authority meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

**2. PUBLIC FORUM**

Chair Soderberg opened and closed the Public Forum as there was no one present to speak.

**3. APPROVE AGENDA**

**MOTION** by Commissioner Huddleston, seconded by Commissioner Whitfield, to approve the Agenda. **Roll Call Vote.** 3 Ayes. (Chair Soderberg, Commissioners Huddleston and Whitfield). **MOTION** passed unanimously.

**4. CONSENT AGENDA**

**4A.** Approve proposed June 25, 2020 minutes

**4B.** Plymouth Towne Square. Accept monthly housing reports

**4C.** Vicksburg Crossing. Accept monthly housing reports

**MOTION** by Commissioner Huddleston, seconded by Commissioner Whitfield, to approve the Consent Agenda. **Roll Call Vote.** 3 Ayes. (Chair Soderberg, Commissioners Huddleston and Whitfield). **MOTION** passed unanimously.

## 5. CONSENT

- 5A. Tax Increment Financing District 1-3. Approve removal of Outlot "C" from Declaration of Restrictive Covenants.

HRA Manager Jim Barnes stated this item should have been placed on the Consent Agenda as Item 4D.

**MOTION** by Commissioner Huddleston, seconded by Commissioner Whitfield, to approve the removal of Outlot "C" from Declaration of Restrictive Covenants. **Roll Call Vote.** 3 Ayes. (Chair Soderberg, Commissioners Huddleston and Whitfield). **MOTION** passed unanimously.

## 6. PUBLIC HEARING

- 6A. Community Development Block Grant. Approve the 2019 Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER).

Community Development Coordinator Lupini provided an overview of the staff report.

Chair Soderberg opened and closed the public hearing as there was no one present to speak on the issue.

**MOTION** by Commissioner Huddleston, seconded by Chair Soderberg, to approve the 2019 Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER). **Roll Call Vote.** 3 Ayes. (Chair Soderberg, Commissioners Huddleston and Whitfield). **MOTION** passed unanimously.

## 7. NEW BUSINESS

- 7A. Consider purchase agreement and other expenditures for the property located at the northeast quadrant of Fernbrook Lane and Rockford Road.

Community Development Coordinator Lupini provided an overview of the staff report.

Barbara Zadeh, from Mobarta Homes LLC introduced herself and provided some background of the property. She stated she agreed to the price since the property would be developed for veteran housing in partnership with the organization Beyond the Yellow Ribbon (BTYR).

Chair Soderberg expressed appreciation regarding the willingness to sell this property to the HRA and also that the HRA is excited about opportunity

HRA Manager Jim Barnes stated the HRA will have 60 days to conduct due diligence and if all proceeds as expected the closing will occur at that time. He stated it has been a pleasure to work

with Ms. Zadeh as well as to partner with an organization that assists veterans and with our funding partners.

**MOTION** by Commissioner Huddleston, seconded by Commissioner Whitfield, to approve the purchase agreement and other expenditures for the property located at the northeast quadrant of Fernbrook Lane and Rockford Road. **Roll Call Vote. 3 Ayes.** (Chair Soderberg, Commissioners Huddleston and Whitfield). **MOTION** passed unanimously.

**7B.** Strategic Plan. Review and discuss HRA's strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT).

Ms. Bennett provided an update to the HRA Board on the progress of the HRA Strategic Plan. She explained that the SWOT analysis, which the Board would be discussing this evening, is a tool used to help understand where you are and where you want to go as an organization. This method identifies strengths and weakness, which are internal factors that are controllable. It then determines opportunities and threats, which are external factors that cannot be controlled. She defined opportunities as grants or potential developments, and threats as financial resources, market impacts, and political situations. She also said she would be going through all sections of the SWOT analysis at the joint meeting with City Council, and asked for clarification on the date of that meeting.

HRA Manager Barnes replied that the joint Council/HRA meeting is scheduled for October 22<sup>nd</sup> at 5:00 p.m.

Ms. Bennett said at that meeting she will present the goals and strategies of the HRA to the Council. She then began the SWOT analysis process, beginning with the commissioners listing the known strengths.

Chair Soderberg began by saying Plymouth is a relatively wealthy suburb with positive financial ability. She also said the HRA board and staff are motivated to take action. She said the HRA may have had a few years of less activity than they would have liked, but are now looking to take more action and positively affect the community. She finally said there is a good track record with the HRA-owned senior housing buildings.

Commissioner Huddleston said in addition to a motivated staff, it is beneficial that staff has a lot of relevant experience. In addition, he stated that staffs' familiarity with the geography of Plymouth is a strong asset.

Commissioner Whitfield added the HRA has been welcoming and has shown itself to be inclusive of an increasingly diverse population.

Ms. Bennett read the response from Commissioner Larson. His response stated that a strength is the Board's decision-making ability, specifically in informing the council about ways to engage community members and make a difference.

Ms. Bennett inquired if there are any other strengths anyone could think of. She stated the commitment of the HRA to Plymouth is a strength as well. She then said weakness are sometimes harder to think of, and asked the commissioners what kind of internal weaknesses they think the HRA has.

Chair Soderberg said a weakness she sees is the invisibility of housing issues in our community. She stated that it is easy to see the nice housing and not anything else. She continued by saying some of our housing issues get lost and that there is also a labeling of affordable housing as not being desirable in our community.

Ms. Bennett requested clarification as to whether the labeling is an internal weakness or a threat.

Chair Soderberg replied that it is more of a threat. She added that as a body the HRA has inertia, but also a feeling that Council does not have a strong opinion on what over the HRA should be doing.

Commissioner Huddleston said a weakness he sees relates to many years of fiscal conservativeness. He has the impression that both Council and the community feel the HRA can do anything it wants as long as it does not spend any money.

Ms. Bennett asserted that she would label the feeling of fiscal conservativeness as a threat because it makes the HRA unable to do its work.

Commissioner Huddleston agreed, and said a weakness may be an unwillingness to stand up for one's beliefs.

Ms. Bennett asked whether an inability to lead is similar to Commissioner Huddleston's point.

Commissioner Huddleston said yes that is concise.

Commissioner Whitfield said she has only been on the board a short time, but she agrees with Chair Soderberg that the HRA has not been able to fully do their part. She added that making Plymouth in and of itself more diverse does not mean it will necessarily make the City more inclusive.

Ms. Bennett asked if the programs and the people the Board serves are diverse.

Commissioner Whitfield answered yes.

Ms. Bennett asked if residents that the HRA programs serve lack diversity.

Commissioner Whitfield replied that she feels families of low income are welcomed into certain areas of Plymouth.

Commissioner Huddleston asked if it is fair to ask the HRA Manager for strengths and weaknesses at this point, as he has two decades of experience.

Ms. Bennett said staff could share their input related to strengths and weaknesses. She then asked Council Member Davis for his analysis.

Council Member Davis said he does not really have input related to strengths and weaknesses as he has served as the liaison for only a couple months. He said he is impressed by staffs' support. He asked whether the Board is providing services for what the community wants or are we acting on what we think they need.

Ms. Bennett replied that perhaps the HRA is not meeting the needs of the community because they do not know what those needs are. She read Commissioner Larson's response related to weaknesses of the HRA. He stated there is inexperience on the board related to real estate development and economics. He also wrote that not many residents are aware of the HRA and its purpose, as well as the decisions it makes for the community.

Chair Soderberg requested Commissioner Larson's statement be read again.

Ms. Bennett summarized Commissioner Larson's statement as the HRA may be insulated from accountability, which could be a weakness. She reiterated she is paraphrasing Commissioner Larson's statement. She asked HRA Manager Barnes to comment.

HRA Manager Barnes stated he would contact Commissioner Larson to clarify his comments.

Ms. Bennett stated that the two biggest weakness for the HRA as she has heard from the Board is that its members are not as educated as it could be in regards to real estate and economics and also that many residents are not aware of the function of the HRA board. She asked if all the commissioners agree.

Commissioner Huddleston agreed with the second statement, but stated that HRA members do have a depth of knowledge in real estate.

Chair Soderberg stated that she believes the HRA has more strengths than we are giving ourselves credit for.

Mrs. Bennett inquired if there were any other comments or questions before moving on to opportunities and threats. She reminded the board that the opportunities are defined as external factors they are not taking advantage of. Threats are external items that the HRA has no control over. Both opportunities and threats could be trends in the community, as well as current economic conditions.

Chair Soderberg said there is opportunity associated with an increased awareness across the state about housing. This is because people are starting to see homelessness and understand it more, as well as how housing impacts people in other ways. She said another opportunity might be funding from COVID-related programs

Ms. Bennett asked what actions the Board wants to see the HRA take in next five years.

Commissioner Huddleston said that getting the community to better understand what the HRA has to offer is a goal. He said he could be off base, but there are a lot of programs and dollars to figure out; and he's not sure that as many are aware of what goes on with the HRA.

Ms. Bennett clarified if "looking for ways to educate" encapsulates Commissioner Huddleston's points.

Commissioner Huddleston said yes, like marketing programs.

Commissioner Whitfield said she agrees with Chair Soderberg and Commissioner Huddleston. She said it is important to get information about the HRA's programs out to the public to them get them more involved in what the HRA does. Additionally, funding from the federal government is especially available now to help. Finally, she reemphasized that people know how serious homelessness is for individuals and families.

Ms. Bennett asked if the HRA is interested in redevelopment.

Commissioner Whitfield responded that would be something to follow through with. She is not sure how many old buildings or warehouses there are to be redeveloped and that people are holding on to. She also said it is important to look at the costs because it takes a lot of different sources of funding for redevelopment.

Ms. Bennett inquired if the commissioners agreed.

Chair Soderberg said the City has identified a number of properties for redevelopment. In western Plymouth, there is more housing, which provides some opportunities. In eastern Plymouth, there is a chance to do some good with the Four Seasons mall project being a good example. She stated that the HRA's senior housing is popular and that there are over 90 people on the waiting lists for both buildings.

Ms. Bennett suggested that an opportunity may be the HRA-provided senior housing.

Chair Soderberg clarified the HRA should be looking for more affordable housing in general, as senior housing with amenities seems to be doing well.

Ms. Bennett summarized Commissioner Larson's opportunities submission. He wrote that opportunities include having the ability to inform the Council about how to be more attractive to

developers, as well as educating residents and developers about additional options. He said educating the HRA on finance, economics and real estate would be opportunities to pursue.

Ms. Bennett stated it seems that many of the stated opportunities revolve around education. It is an external factor to educate the general public on these topics so that the public understands why the HRA is participating in a development. Ms. Bennett stated that once the public and stakeholders have a chance to provide input into the strategic plan process, it will be important to add additional opportunities to the SWOT analysis.

Commissioner Huddleston said another opportunity might be to look at other cities' approach to developers where there is a benefit to affordable housing. An example is Bloomington; there is a policy that could start with HRA and then be presented to the City Council for consideration.

Ms. Bennett asked if it is inclusionary housing policies or are they requesting affordability.

Commissioner Huddleston replied the model is that the city requires the developer to include a certain percentage of affordable housing in any project that receives public assistance.

HRA Manager Barnes added there are inclusionary housing policies in communities across the metro area. Bloomington has taken the position to have a policy that provides some flexibility in the way developments can include affordable housing in their project.

Ms. Bennett asked Councilmember Davis if there were any opportunities he foresaw for the HRA over the next five years.

Councilmember Davis replied that what was said is sufficient.

Ms. Bennett summarized what was previously said in regards to threats faced by the HRA Board. She asked Commissioner Whitfield if she agrees that her earlier point related to a lack of diversity could be perceived as a threat.

Commissioner Whitfield replied it is somewhat of a threat. She stated that she has only lived in Plymouth for a couple years; and is beginning to see where and how diversity is coming about. There was a time when Plymouth was not diverse, and that an increasingly diverse population will bring a lot of different momentums to Plymouth. Also, having different businesses take interest in Plymouth will be advantageous.

Ms. Bennett said the increase in diversity of housing and business is also an opportunity. The other threat she heard mentioned was the fiscally conservative attitude of the community. She noted both Commissioners Huddleston and Larson said running out of dollars to spend could be a threat.

Chair Soderberg said the high cost of land makes everything the HRA does a struggle, and that the invisibility of many housing issues in Plymouth is a threat. There is a widespread belief in

affordable housing, but many residents do not want that type of housing in their neighborhood. She said there is a perceived notion that workforce housing is detrimental to property values.

Ms. Bennett asked Commissioner Huddleston if there are other threats that affect the HRA's ability to do their work, and whether fiscal conservatism is one of them.

Commissioner Huddleston replied that the old school fiscally conservative attitude is a threat to the HRA's ability to do their job.

Ms. Bennett asked if demographics are a threat or opportunity. She also asked about senior housing and younger people leaving the community, and whether those items are threats or opportunities.

Chair Soderberg responded she has lived here for 31 years. She said that when she moved to Plymouth there was a huge building frenzy of single-family homes and she was a part of that. However, now that her kids are grown she is wondering how to transition. She said that when she looks at her kids she knows they want some sort of entertainment in their community, which Plymouth is lacking. She noted the difficulty of attracting people, especially younger generations, to Plymouth. She also stated that the COVID pandemic has an impact on everything and said it will be important to determine if the current environment is the new normal.

Ms. Bennett asked Councilmember Davis if there are any threats he can think of.

Councilmember Davis replied he thought the biggest threat is the council's reluctance to fund the HRA in what they want to do. He said the HRA is stuck in an annual two percent increase, and that there is a lot of talk about housing needs without any increase in funding.

Ms. Bennett concluded by stating the SWOT analysis will be reviewed before sending results to the council.

HRA Manager Barnes directed the commissioners and Council Member Davis to continue to keep thinking and writing down ideas. He asked the Board to send those ideas to staff before the September meeting. At that meeting we will also finalize what the HRA wants to bring to council.

Commissioner Huddleston asked if there will be input from the community for the HRA commissioners to consider before meeting with the Council.

HRA Manager Barnes said they are working with Flash Vote to get questions formatted and out to the public before September so stakeholders and the community can provide input.

Ms. Bennett said she will be in contact with agencies such as PRISM and Interfaith Outreach as well as the school districts and the HRA.

Chair Soderberg asked how staff input will be incorporated into the process.

HRA Manager Barnes answered that staff input will not be a part of this strategic plan process. At this point, staff is hoping for direction and information to come from the HRA Board and others participating in the process. As the strategic plan is formulated, staff will provide input as it relates to historic HRA actions, specifically what actions have worked and which have not.

Chair Soderberg asked if there are any other thoughts on the Strategic Plan. She asked HRA Manager Barnes to provide updates of ongoing projects.

## **8. UPDATES**

CDBG and COVID related funding  
Cranberry Ridge project  
Element project  
Four Seasons Mall project  
HRA Senior Buildings  
Windows for Vicksburg Crossing

## **9. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION** by Chair Soderberg, with no objection, to adjourn the meeting at 8:07 p.m.