

North Adams City Council
Community Development Committee
DRAFT Meeting Minutes – March 31st, 2020
City Council Chambers

Councilor Lamb read a statement pursuant to Chapter 30A in regards to the meeting being held remotely via Zoom.

6:00 Call to Order

Committee Members Present: Councilor Sweeney, Councilor Lamb
Committee Members Absent: Councilor LaForest

Others Present: Councilor Blackmer, Councilor Harpin, Councilor Hopkins, Zach Feury, Mike Nuwallie

- Councilor Lamb welcomed comment from the community and attendees when those opportunities exist and asked that they prompt him to make comments by either using the chat function or by calling his cellphone

Approval of the Minutes of March 4th – Motion to Postpone: Councilor Sweeney, Second Lamb

Presentation by Zach Feury: Overview of Property Disposition Plan

- Zach Feury from the Community Development Office provided a presentation of the currently developing property disposition plan. The presentation slides are included here as a record for the purpose of meeting minutes

Office of Community Development
Disposition of City-owned Property
WGUHSP Urban Renewal Plan

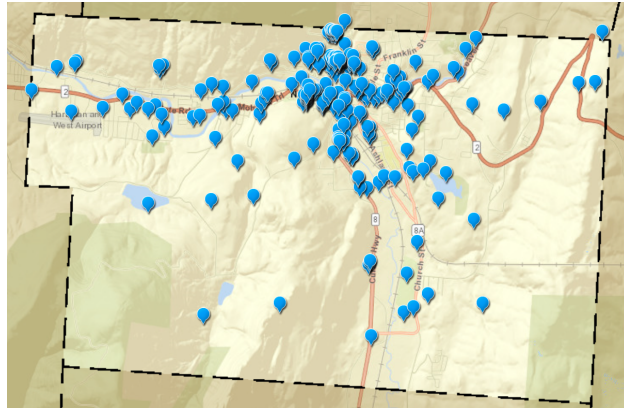
North Adams City Council
Community Development Committee
March 31, 2020

Agenda—Disposition of City-owned Property

- Facts related to City-owned Property
- Variables for Consideration
- Classification of City-owned properties
- Next Steps
- Committee Discussion
- Public Comment

Facts

- Approximately 200 City-owned Properties:



Facts

- Some properties serve:
 - Essential municipal functions:
 - City Hall;
 - DPW;
 - Public Safety;
 - Schools.
 - Non-essential municipal functions:
 - Windsor Mill;
 - Heritage State Park.
 - No municipal function:
 - Vacant parcels;
 - Commercial and industrial properties;
 - Residential properties.

Facts

- City-owned properties with no municipal function:
 - Generate no revenue to the City;
 - Create significant costs;
 - At risk of falling into disrepair.
- The City should move to:
 - Develop a strategic plan for the disposition of functionless properties;
 - Declare functionless properties as surplus;
 - Make such properties available for disposition.

Variables for Consideration

- Zoning district;
 - Allowed uses; and
 - Dimensional requirements.
- Topography;
- Community needs;
- Highest and best future land uses;
- Acquisition.

Acquisition

- Properties have been acquired by various means:
 - Tax title;
 - Gift;
 - Purchase.
- Acquisition process factors into determining disposition approach.

Vehicles for Disposition

- Public Auction:
 - Tax title properties;
 - Conforming lots;
 - Parcels of lesser strategic interest.
- Abutter Sales:
 - Non-conforming lots;
 - Parcels of no strategic interest.
- Requests for Proposals (RFPs):
 - Non-tax title properties;
 - Conforming lots;
 - Parcels of considerable strategic interest.

Vehicles for Disposition

- Public Auction:
 - Organized sale of multiple properties;
 - Only for properties acquired via the tax title process;
 - Open to the public;
 - No Council action required;
 - Expeditious.
- Abutter Sale:
 - Organized sale of properties;
 - Council declaration of surplus required;
 - Limited to abutting landowners.
- RFPs:
 - Allows for greater control over sale;
 - Council declaration of surplus required;
 - Placement of restrictions and terms;
 - Open to the public.

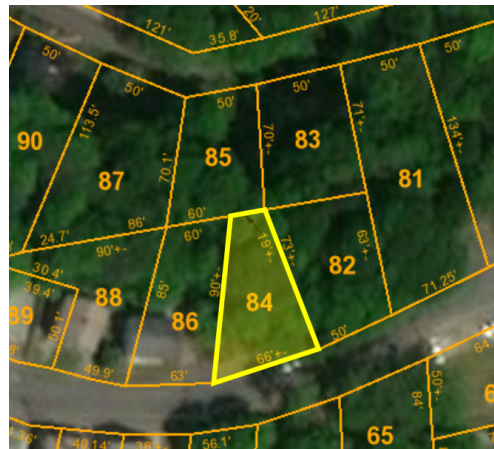
Public Auction Property, Ex.

- Acquired via tax title;
- R-5 zoning district;
- Dimensional Requirements:
 - Conforming lot;
 - 2 dwelling unit maximum.
- Community needs:
 - Residential Parking.
- Highest and best use:
 - Single/two-family home;
 - Additional residential parking.



Abutter Sale Property, Ex.

- Acquired via tax title;
- R-5 Zoning District;
- Dimensional Requirements:
 - Non-conforming;
 - Below min. lot area.
- Community Needs:
 - None identified.
- Highest and best use:
 - Lot expansion.



RFP Property, Ex.

- Various means of Acquisition;
- R5 and B2 Zoning Districts;
- Dimensional Requirements:
 - Individually—No;
 - Merged—Yes.
- Community Needs:
 - Residential parking;
 - Recreation;
 - Additional housing.
- Highest and best use:
 - Infill housing;
 - Residential parking.



Next Steps

- Finalize disposition determinations;
- Develop a strategic plan;
- Work collaboratively to implement the plan.

Questions

zfeury@northadams-ma.gov

- Zach returned control to Councilor Lamb to manage questions
- Councilor Lamb opened up the call to questions and comments from councilors and others in attendance and asked that they state their name for the record.
- Councilor Harpin asked about non-conforming lots and the connection to the ordinance related to non-conforming lots with buildings already on them.
- Zach noted that Bill Meranti would be the best person to ask but noted that any nonconforming lot with an existing building, or a previously existing building may have a permit pulled if done so within one year of the building ceasing to exist.
- Councilor Harpin asked if all properties involved were beyond that time.
- Zach noted that not all of them are necessarily, but the vast majority have been vacant for more than 1 year.
- Councilor Lamb noted that most properties we own do not have buildings on them.
- Zach confirmed that many do not have buildings but wasn't sure if it is a majority or not.
- Councilor Lamb asked how the city defined "community needs" and how those were identified for an RFP process.

- Zach noted that the community needs have been identified over time through community meetings, conversations and historical knowledge. Going forward, there will be community meetings to specifically identify community needs when multiple properties exist in a particular area.
- Councilor Sweeney noted that she appreciated the thorough information.
- Councilor Lamb asked what the best action would be on this particular presentation.
- Zach preferred if the committee could refer to the full council that would be a good way to present the information publicly. The primary goal here was to gain input into the planning efforts and to see if there was anything they were missing or overlooked. There is no real intention of a full vote on something however at this time.
- Councilor Lamb said though it may not need a vote, it feels appropriate to bring it to the full council, especially due to the large number of properties owned by the City. He noted that the way it is broken down is something that would be valuable for the council and community to hear more on. He will put it on the next available council agenda for a presentation.
- Councilor Sweeney agreed.
- Councilor Blackmer likes that the process included different parts of disposition. She wanted to note that the Council's purview on disposition cannot consider whether it is for profit or non-profit, especially with an RFP process. Properties going into private ownership is a benefit, regardless of tax status.
- Zach agreed that the process cannot discriminate against non-profits and added that this process is not meant to be revenue based, but instead to return property to highest best use, whatever that may be. When the price is below assessed value, the council will have the opportunity to speak and vote on it at that time.
- Councilor Blackmer reiterated that these properties remain a cost to the city in terms of securing and maintaining.
- Councilor Lamb asked if all the various processes have a common public posting requirement or if they fluctuated.
- Zach was not entirely sure, but Ross Vivori, the assessor would be able to give a more definitive answer.
- Councilor Lamb closed the conversation and moved on to the next presentation

- Zach provided a presentation on the Western Gateway Urban Renewal Plan. That presentation is included here below and considered part of these minutes.

Agenda—WGUHSP Urban Renewal Plan

- Urban Renewal, Generally
- Facts related to the WGUHSP URP
- Proposed Amendment
- Committee Discussion
- Public Comment

Urban Renewal, Generally

- Established by MGL c.121B to enable:
 - Revitalization of decadent, substandard or blighted areas;
 - Job creation/retention;
 - Provision for low- and moderate-income housing;
 - Enhanced private investment; and
 - Resultant public benefits.
- The Central Tenet:
 - Redevelopment cannot occur “but for” public action.
- Requirement:
 - An approved Urban Renewal Plan.

Urban Renewal, Generally

- Urban Renewal Plan Requirements:

- Eligibility;
- Objectives;
- Acquisitions;
- Relocation;
- Disposition;
- Redeveloper's Obligation;
- Timeframe;
- Financial Plan;
- Citizen Participation; and
- Municipal Approvals.

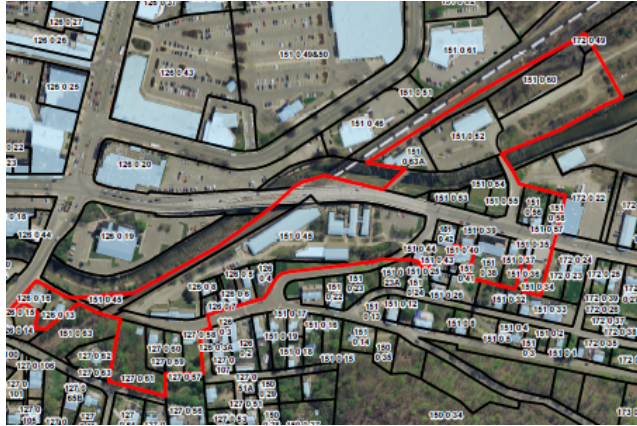
Local Benefits of Urban Renewal Plan

- An approved Urban Renewal Plan:

- Allows municipalities greater flexibility re: targeted redevelopment;
- Provides c.30B exemption to local Redevelopment Authorities;
- Communicates a community's vision, goals, and objectives for redevelopment; and
- Strengthens and enhances competitiveness of grant applications.

WGUHSP Urban Renewal Plan

- Approved in September 1981
- Create a retail destination
- 30-year duration restriction
- Expires September 2021



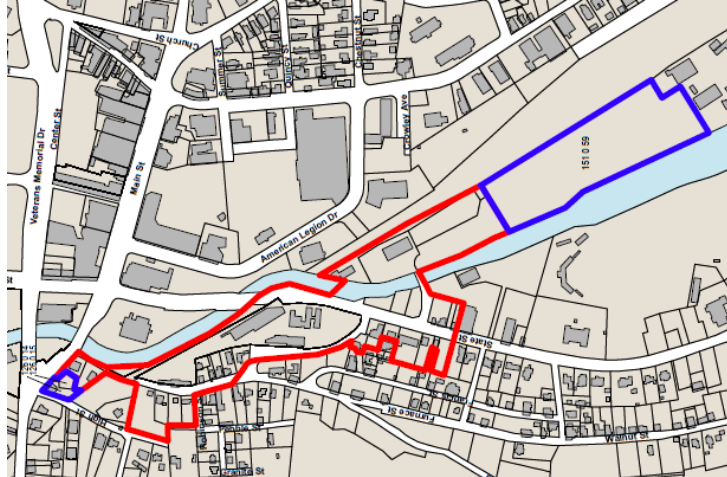
WGUHSP Urban Renewal Plan

- 2016 BSC Assessment:
 - Underlying eligibility conditions remain:
 - Limited connectivity and access;
 - Manmade barriers;
 - Poor visibility from public ways; and
 - Underutilized economically obsolete buildings in poor condition.
 - Public initiatives still to be leveraged by URP:
 - Extension and connections of regional shared-use trails;
 - Enhanced connectivity to downtown and MASS MoCA; and
 - Preservation and revitalization of the Freight Yard Historic District.

WGUHSP Urban Renewal Plan

- 2016 BSC Recommendations:

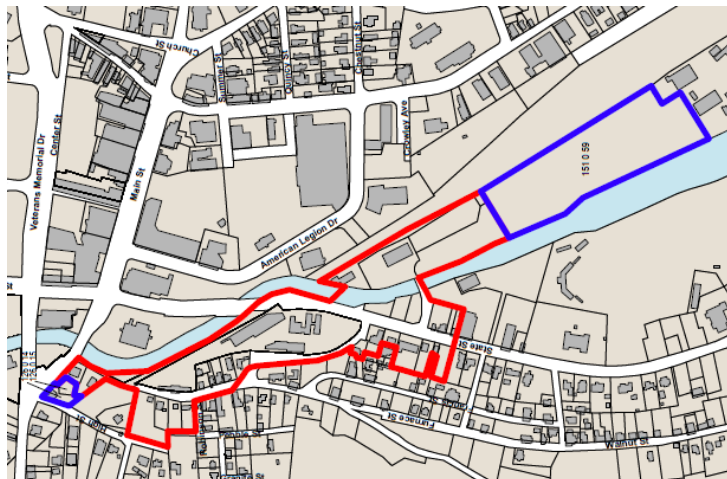
- Extend the plan through 2025;
- Expand the boundaries to incorporate NARA-owned parcels



WGUHSP Urban Renewal Plan

- 2020 OCD Recommendations:

- Extend the plan through 2031;
- Expand the boundaries to incorporate NARA-owned parcels



WGUHSP URP Amendment

- Process:
 - The Amendment:
 - A written document that addresses the following:
 - Eligibility;
 - Objectives;
 - Acquisitions;
 - Relocation;
 - Disposition;
 - Redeveloper's Obligation;
 - Timeframe;
 - Financial Plan;
 - Citizen Participation; and
 - Municipal Approvals.
 - Municipal Approvals:
 - URP Amendment requires:
 - Approval by the Redevelopment Authority;
 - A Planning Board determination that the URP Amendment aligns with the City's Comprehensive Plan;
 - City Council approval by 2/3 majority.

Next Steps

- Gauge City Council's sentiment;
- If positive, begin drafting URP amendment;
- Finalize URP amendment by February 2021;
- Begin public approval process by March 2021.

Questions

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- Zach turned it over to Councilor Lamb for questions
- Councilor Lamb thanked Zach for the very thorough presentation.
- Councilor Sweeney offered disclosure that at one point she was considering property at Heritage State Park through Common Folk, but that has since not been pursued and she has filed disclosures accordingly. She asked what the future of the property looks like if it is not approved for the extension.
- Zach indicated that it would be very up in the air and unknown. If it is not amended or extended we lose the tools of Urban Renewal which help with expediting redevelopment. That would further jeopardize the future of the public properties
- Councilor Lamb noted that this brings stackable credential to potential development but asked what the negatives would be in adopting an extension.
- Zach noted that the contemporary perception of Urban Renewal is the biggest downside, especially here where we have experienced the unfortunate detriment of former models of Urban Renewal. This is not about acquiring, relocating or demolition and clearing of land, it is about preserving the beneficial tools of Urban Renewal so a thoughtful redevelopment of the area can be done to meet the changing needs of the community. The issue is the stigma of the past.
- Councilor Lamb asked if that includes privately owned properties in the area in question

- Zach referred to slide 22 and noted that there are several privately owned properties included. They have been in there since 1981, but we do not have any intention to affect those properties in any way, even though they are in the plan area.
- Councilor Lamb asked if any new private properties would be added.
- Zach affirmed there would be no new private property added.
- Councilor Hopkins indicated that at any time we could cancel the plan, even if extended.
- Zach affirmed there is a process to terminate at a future date.
- Councilor Harpin asked what the highlighted colors specified in terms of adding new property and asked if some of that is on Ashland Street.
- Zach noted that it is a redevelopment owned property that extends that way already, and 8 acre parcel. Most of that parcel is already in the plan so this would eliminate the split lot.
- Councilor Harpin asked about the small property on the other end.
- Zach indicated both of those are also owned by the redevelopment authority.
- Councilor Lamb noted that that was the plot next to the Tapestry Health building.
- Councilor Lamb noted that based on what he has seen it is more of an overlay. It functions more as opportunities for development rather than what was done historically via urban renewal. He asked if there could be other incentive-based overlays beyond urban renewal in the future?
- Zach indicated that urban renewal plan areas can also be included with other overlays like starter home districts, smart growth, and others that the city might want to adopt.
- Mike Nuvallie commended Zach on what he put forth and wanted to emphasize that it makes sense to extend this to match up with the 2030 vision plan in terms of aligning efforts to aggressively redevelop, rather than having things expire off-cycle. When adopted in 2014 the plan was stuck with antiquated zoning which they have spent significant time to clean up. He also noted that some processes of property disposition are very short, while others are much longer when it comes to doing RFPs. This is why it's important to not overload RFPs with too many onerous pieces that make it even more challenging.

- Councilor Blackmer thanked Zach. Unfortunately it looks like when we started urban renewal the economy crashed in the late 80s which set us back and made it difficult to leverage what urban renewal tools
- Councilor Sweeney agrees that this makes sense to align our tools like Mike mentioned.
- Councilor Lamb noted that this is a coalescence of efforts and plans at a singular point which makes this seem very logical to pursue. He then requested a motion to refer to the full Council since it feels a bit more robust.
- Motion to refer to the full council at the next available meeting: Councilor Sweeney / Second: Lamb – Motion Carries
- Motion to Adjourn: Councilor Sweeney / Second: Councilor Lamb – Motion Carries
- Meeting Adjourned: 7:01pm