

City of Clearwater

*Main Library - Council Chambers
100 N. Osceola Avenue
Clearwater, FL 33755*



Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

8:00 AM

Main Library - Council Chambers

Community Redevelopment Agency

Roll Call

Present 5 - Chair Frank Hibbard, Trustee David Allbritton (Arrived – 8:11 a.m.), Trustee Hoyt Hamilton, Trustee Kathleen Beckman, and Trustee Mark Bunker

Also Present: William B. Horne II – City Manager, Micah Maxwell – Assistant City Manager, Michael Delk – Assistant City Manager, Pamela K. Akin City Attorney, Rosemarie Call – City Clerk, Nicole Sprague – Deputy City Clerk, and Amanda Thompson – CRA Executive Director

To provide continuity for research, items are listed in agenda order although not necessarily discussed in that order.

Unapproved

1. Call to Order – Chair Hibbard

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 a.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

- 2.1 Approve the January 19, 2021 CRA Meeting Minutes as submitted in written summation by the City Clerk.

Trustee Hamilton moved to approve the January 19, 2021 CRA Meeting Minutes as submitted in written summation by the City Clerk. The motion was duly seconded and carried unanimously.

3. Citizens to be Heard Regarding Items Not on the Agenda – None.

4. New Business Items

- 4.1 Presentation from AMPLIFY Clearwater, Downtown Clearwater Merchant's Association, Clearwater Downtown Development Board and the Clearwater Downtown Partnership

The Community Redevelopment Agency has invited four downtown organizations who support and advocate for the business community in downtown to provide a brief update on their 2021 plans.

AMPLIFY Clearwater CEO Amanda Payne said the organization has contracted with the CRA to bring people to events in Downtown. As a convener of the business community, Amplify Clearwater can bring the business community together and set a vision for Downtown and economic development.

Clearwater Downtown Merchants Association Co-Chair Scott Sousa thanked Council and staff for the street closure of the 400 and 500 blocks on Cleveland Street during COVID, which has helped businesses remain open. The street closure led to rebranding the area as The District. The District has received positive feedback and increased public relations. Programming now includes a monthly program that dedicates 10% of sales to assist a local charity. He said the organization is now working on an education component for merchants seeking PPP loans.

In response to questions, Mr. Sousa said the organization sent approximately 8 direct mail pieces during the Fall that included upcoming events and was very effective. The organization is now experimenting with different markets outside of Clearwater city limits. The first mailers targeted zip codes near Downtown and then began branching out to areas that included base clientele, selecting a different area each time. Each mailing costs approximately \$3,000.

Clearwater Downtown Partnership Vice Chair Lina Teixeira said the organization is comprised of members with diverse professional and industry backgrounds. The CDP wishes to support and coordinate with other entities in an effort to decrease duplication. The organization has implemented an education component for local merchants and small business, with interest to expanding educational opportunities to the community as a whole. Community engagement is paramount to the success of Downtown. Ms. Teixeira said the organization is ready to host Clearwater's first Tampa Bay Innovation Week, which will include internationally known keynote speakers and draw great thought leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs.

Downtown Development Board Chair Paris Morfopoulos said the DDB has been seated for over 50 years and was created to by the Florida Legislature in 1970 to address blight in downtown. DDB's goals are to preserve property values, prevent deterioration, and to create, revitalize, and promote the City's business district. The DDB provides incentives and targeted grants to organizations that create events or support the arts in Downtown.

In response to questions, Mr. Morfopoulos said the City has a perception that is it is difficult to work with; if the City were more business friendly, it may improve prospects of attracting businesses to Downtown. Mr. Sousa said a small group of various stakeholders were formed prior to the

holidays; the group will begin to meet again and will try to engage other individuals. CRA Executive Director Amanda Thompson said next month the Trustees will hear from organizations that work to attract diverse groups of people and activities to Downtown. Ms. Payne said Amplify Clearwater this Spring will roll out a diversity and inclusion program, with the goal to engage the minority business community.

Discussion ensued with comments made that the CRA has strived to attract diverse groups with diverse events. The City Manager said staff does follow-up on business complaints but if the stakeholders present today hear something, please call us. At time it is difficult to manage the business owners' expectations while they face certain challenges. When the 1999 Community Development Code was adopted, the higher standards have challenged the business community to invest more in rehabilitation and property redevelopment in order to meet building codes.

4.2 Update on the Community Redevelopment Agency's marketing campaigns and other marketing services in 2021.

CRA staff will provide an update on the agency's most successful marketing campaigns in 2020 and new programs for 2021 including:

- the Opportunity Zone advertising campaign
- the Bluff RFP advertising campaign
- the contract with Bandwagon, LLC to implement a community survey identify downtown's brand
- retaining a marketing consultant for use by businesses impacted by streetscape construction
- the development of public education videos about the CRA and its operations

Public Relations and Program Manager Rosemary D'amour provided a PowerPoint presentation.

In response to questions, Ms. D'amour said, from a digital perspective, pride can be measured through clickable civic pride, how many followers does the CRA have on social media and how many followers are using the Facebook profiles frames. CRA Executive Director Amanda Thompson said gallop surveys can be used to measure civic pride by asking how attached does one feel to a specific location. Ms. D'amour said staff budgets \$15,000 annually for paid media. The City had an existing contract with Bandwagon and the CRA piggybacked off the contract to align with city messaging and avoiding duplicating efforts. She

said Bandwagon is also working with Amplified Clearwater.

4.3 Provide feedback and direction on proposed grant programs to reduce blight and vacancy throughout the Community Redevelopment Agency district.

The Community Redevelopment Agency's two-year strategy outlines a variety of action steps to shift the perception of downtown to encourage private investment. These actions typically fall into three categories - services that are delivered directly by CRA staff, services that the CRA staff pays outside organizations to provide and grants for projects implemented by private businesses and/or non-profit organizations. The purpose of today's discussion is to receive feedback and direction on grant programs designed to directly reduce blight and vacancy in the CRA through the rehabilitation of commercial properties.

The CRA has three active grant programs - the façade grant, the sidewalk furniture grant and the general incentive request form. CRA staff has spent 18 months in conversation with tenants, property owners and other city staff to better understand how to develop partnerships with the community that will improve the appearance of commercial properties and reduce vacancy. Staff has learned that many smaller business owners (tenants) do not take advantage of the façade program because of the required five-year facade easement which must be signed by the property owner. This grant is also limited to portions of the building adjacent to a public right of way. The general incentive request has been used two times - for streetscape improvements and a construction of rental housing, but it is not suited for smaller requests that are more about building maintenance than truly an incentive request. The sidewalk furniture grant is limited to the downtown core area and to outdoor furniture only.

There are three programs in development that staff wishes to bring forward for adoption in March 2021. These will be ongoing programs with an annual budget allocation. For each program, staff would like feedback on the following items:

1. Who is eligible to apply for the grant? Property owners? Tenants?
2. Should all properties be considered equally or ranked according to location, state of disrepair, current or proposed use or another consideration?
3. Should the CRA require a financial match?
4. What is a higher priority for the CRA - improving the exterior appearance of commercial properties (less cost and can reach more properties) OR assisting with the buildout of vacant properties to potentially fill those spaces (higher cost and less properties)?

A summary of each of the proposed programs is provided below as a starting point for the conversation.

CRA Beautification Grant (Exterior Improvements)

The purpose of this program is to improve the visual appearance of commercial properties through exterior improvements. Grants may be given to property owners or tenants. Eligible improvements include painting, signage, lighting, doors, windows, site improvements and other minor exterior repairs. These grants are for projects that do not exceed \$25,000 in total project costs. CRA will fully fund grants up to \$5,000 and will provide a 50% match towards the total project cost up to a maximum of \$12,500.

CRA Whitebox Grant (Small Renovation)

The purpose of this program is to assist owners and/or tenants with renovating commercial spaces for to establish long term and short term uses that generate pedestrian traffic. This program would allow for currently vacant spaces to host “pop-up” retail or arts attractions as well as convert office space to a use that would allow for large groups of people to gather, like a gallery space or a bar. Property owners or tenants would be eligible for this grant. Eligible improvements include exterior improvements like painting, signage, lighting, doors, windows, site improvements and other minor exterior repairs. Eligible interior improvements include windows, doors, standard lighting and electrical, basic HVAC, concrete floor, ADA restrooms and water fountain, utility upgrades and fire code improvements. These grants are for projects that do not exceed \$100,000 in total project costs. The CRA will fully fund grants up to \$25,000 and will provide a 50% match towards the total project costs up to a maximum of \$50,000 per project.

CRA Vacancy Reduction Grant (Large Renovation)

The purpose of this program is to assist owners and/or tenants with renovating commercial spaces for to establish long term uses that generate pedestrian traffic. Property owners would be eligible for this grant. Eligible improvements include exterior improvements like painting, signage, lighting, doors, windows, site improvements and other minor exterior repairs. Eligible interior improvements include windows, doors, standard lighting and electrical, basic HVAC, concrete floor, ADA restrooms and fountain and fire code improvements. Other improvements that remain with the building will be considered. These grants are for large projects that exceed \$500,000 in total project costs. The CRA will provide a 50% match towards the total project costs up to a maximum of \$250,000 per project.

CRA Executive Director Amanda Thompson provided a PowerPoint presentation.

In response to questions, Ms. Thompson said there are two pending requests: 1) \$120,000 grant request for a tenant to turn the former Gala's

Ice Cream space into a café; and 2) \$1 million grant request for two sites for a brewery incubator. Staff recommends contracting a third party to vet business plans for restaurants requesting more than \$250,000 in grant funds. The City Attorney said the Trustees have an obligation to ensure the funds are being used in a way they are intended to be used and serve the purpose they are intended for. Some form of security is needed; staff looks at alternatives the borrowers can deal with. Ms. Thompson said once the grants are available, staff will issue a press release and post the information in the newsletter and on social media. Staff has met with all the tenants and business owners and determined the beautification grants are needed by the small businesses, especially in the Downtown Gateway. The grant programs can be capped at one year or roll over year to year subject to annual budget approval. Most of the funds used for the grants will be CRA TIF funds. Ms. Thompson said staff can include an income cap as part of the grant program if the Trustees direct such change.

Discussion ensued with support expressed to proceed with the program as presented.

5. Director's Report – None.

6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:39 a.m.

Attest

Chair
Community Redevelopment Agency

City Clerk