

LCI Board Meeting Minutes
September 28, 2022 (Via Zoom)

PRESENT: Hon. Richard Furlow, Nadine Horton, Seth Poole, Hon. Ernie Santiago, Arlevia Samuel (Executive Director), Michael Pinto (Office of Corporation Counsel), Evan Trachten (LCI staff)

Absent: Patricia Brett

Guests: None

Meeting called to order at 6:01 P.M.

**Roll call of Members: Alder Richard Furlow, Alder Ernie Santiago
Nadine Horton, Seth Poole**

Review of LCI Board meeting minutes from August 24, 2022. A motion to approve was made by Nadine Horton, seconded by Alder Santiago, roll call of members was taken, approved unanimously.

New Business

44 Brewster Street and 173 Ivy Street

Evan told the Board the City of New Haven proposes to acquire 44 Brewster Street and 173 Ivy Street for the Board of Education. The Board of Education plans to move "Adult Education" to a city-owned building at 188 Bassett Street and this land is needed for parking. LCI has engaged the owner and sent an offer to the owner for \$150,000. Evan received a call from attorney Wendy Clarke who represents the owner Brack Poitier and informed Evan that the owner is being opportunistic and is asking for \$300,000 plus forgiveness of approximately \$68,000 of back taxes. The properties are currently in tax foreclosure. LCI would like the Board to authorize the City to acquire this property and give us the ability to utilize all of our tools, up to and including eminent domain. This land was previously leased to be used with 188 Bassett Street.

Evan noted the court has updated appraisals of this land and the total value of the site is valued at \$80,000 (\$40,000 per parcel). The date of the appraisals is September 28, 2022. LCI will continue to engage the owner to acquire this land as a friendly acquisition. The Board of Education will cover the cost of the acquisition. Attorney Pinto noted we need specific language to authorize this acquisition if we utilize eminent domain.

Nadine asked if the owner does not want to sell this land does that stop the development? Evan told the Board the City can utilize eminent domain and take the property as a last resort; a judge will decide the fair market value if it ends up as a taking (just compensation). City staff believe our offer of \$150,000 is a fair number given the court appraisals. The city hired appraisers but this project is time sensitive, so we are moving this forward while our appraisals are pending. The City does not have the ability to purchase this property at a foreclosure sale if an auction were to occur.

Seth asked about what period of tax delinquency does \$68,000 represent? Evan went to the court website and opened the complaint. The years of non-payment are from 2013 forward. The lot is currently overgrown and has several vehicles on-site. The site is an odd shape and the parcels do not have the typical shape of adjacent parcels which would make residential development more challenging. The shape also impacts the value. The site is currently blighted with overgrown vegetation and junked vehicles.

Evan noted the City Plan Advisory supports the acquisition and recommends approval and suggests landscaping to buffer this site from the Canal Line as well of compliance with storm water management and heat island regulations. Bicycle parking is also noted in the report. This acquisition will allow the Board of Education to stop leasing a site to host the current Adult Education center.

Alder Santiago asked about how long the City waits to foreclosure on a taxpayer and why is this time sensitive? Evan said he doesn't work for the tax office but from what he has seen if you miss multiple payments and don't enter into a payment plan, a foreclosure action is likely started by the City of New Haven. Evan said the Board of Education needs site control and plans to apply for State funding. Alder Santiago asked if this is an eminent domain taking, what is the maximum cost to the City? Evan said the court would make the determination about value. Attorney Pinto noted there is no guarantee of a strict foreclosure so there would be a foreclosure by sale if the foreclosure moves forward. Alder Santiago asked if eminent domain would stop the foreclosure sale process. Attorney Pinto said yes. The City can't dictate a maximum acquisition cost because the court will decide the value if it was an eminent domain taking.

A motion was made by Alder Santiago to acquire the property in an amount not to exceed \$150,000 as a friendly acquisition, and also authorize the acquisition to take the property for school purposes and to utilize any and all tools available to the City of New Haven including and up to eminent domain at fair market value as determined by the judge, seconded by Nadine Horton, roll call as taken, approved unanimously.

Old Business / Discussion

Seth opened the discussion by reminding the Board that we have been planning to discuss the role and responsibility of the LCI Board. Nadine reminded the Board about our on-going conversation about transparency around LCI Board and information requested by the LCI Board. Nadine will check the minutes because she doesn't remember the exact topic off hand because it has been a several months since this topic was mentioned.

Seth mentioned community blight and the Board helping to enforce the ordinance. Seth noted that complaints occur at community management teams. Can the Board help staff enforce the regulations based on complaints? Evan noted that historically the Board has not been involved in enforcement matters, but the Board has open communication with staff. We want to hear from the Board about any concerns within the realm of LCI. Seth mentioned 570 Winthrop Avenue, the “cat house”. Evan told the Board the City acquired this property via foreclosure and it’s city-owned. The property has been sitting and hasn’t been turned around quickly. Evan believes that Beulah submitted an application to purchase the property, but the former alder didn’t support the sale. Alder Abdusabor wanted the neighbors to be able to purchase the property. Seth noted the property is open to the elements and racoons have taken over the structure. Seth asked how this issue can be addressed? Evan said the issue should be brought to the Neighborhood Specialist and they would work with LCI staff to resolve this issue. Arlevia told the Board we slacked on this and there is on excuse for this situation. Arlevia said she will escalate this issue and have Frank D’Amore immediately resolve this issue.

Nadine said we would like to see an organizational chart. Nadine does not want to micromanage staff, she wanted clarification about the power of LCI. Nadine noted that Paul the Neighborhood Specialist has been great. Nadine wants residents to know which department is responsible for certain issues. Arlevia said residents call LCI about all issues. LCI is doing more to interact with the community so they know what we do. LCI does monthly outreach and is expanding this outreach via social media and on-site community events. Arlevia will share a presentation about what LCI does in the future. Seth would like to see the workflow in this format. Arlevia has been discussing increasing blight foreclosures with Attorney Pinto.

Seth noted the Whalley Avenue corridor could use two neighborhood specialists because of issues. Arlevia noted that she asked for more Neighborhood Specialists in the last budget, but that request wasn’t approved. Arlevia is pairing Housing Code staff with the Neighborhood Specialists to address issues in each neighborhood. Nadine said to feel free to bring any ideas to the Board and they will bring it to the community. Alder Furlow noted some alders have issues with their Neighborhood Specialist. Alder Furlow and the alders support the work of LCI and the Neighborhood Specialists, but it wasn’t possible during the last budget cycle to add more Neighborhood Specialists. Alder Furlow is happy to discuss this topic with Arlevia. The alders fully support Director Samuel.

Alder Santiago asked if the acquisition item should go the Board of Alders via Unanimous Consent (UC). Attorney Pinto noted LCI items come to the Board from the PAD process as a second read. Evan mentioned sending the items via the Suspension Agenda. Staff will follow up with the second floor.

A motion to adjourn mas made by Alder Furlow, seconded by Alder Santiago. Roll call was taken, approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned 6:56PM