



FITCHBURG REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
renewing • revitalizing • rebuilding

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# MEETING MINUTES

March 21, 2023

Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority Office  
166 Boulder Drive, Suite 104 East, Fitchburg, Massachusetts

*Meeting held in person and via Zoom*

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Charles Caron, Chair  
Jay Roy, Vice Chair  
Maribel Cruz, Treasurer  
Laura O’Kane, Member

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Mark Dohan, Executive Director, NewVue Communities  
Steven Cook, NewVue Communities  
Elmer Melendez, Owner, Dario’s  
Jackie Cullen, Owner, River Styx Brewing  
Michael Esposito  
Phil Esposito  
Shashane Sahakian  
Liz Murphy, Director of Housing and Development, City of Fitchburg  
Mary Jo Bohart, Economic Development Director, City of Fitchburg  
(arrived at 7:55 am)  
Meagen Donoghue, Executive Director, FRA  
Sarah Stebulis, Business Administrator, FRA

## 1. MEETING CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Caron called meeting to order at 7:35 a.m.

## 2. READING AND APPROVAL OF REGULAR MEETING MINUTES FROM JANUARY 17, 2023, ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES FROM MARCH 1, 2023, AND EXECUTIVE SESSION MEETING MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 10, 2023.

Ms. O’Kane motioned to accept the regular meeting minutes from January 17, 2023 and March 1, 2023 and enter them into the FRA’s minute’s book. Seconded by Ms. Cruz. The motion carried by 3-0 vote.

Ms. O’Kane motioned to accept the executive session meeting minutes from February 10, 2023 and enter them into the FRA’s minute’s book. Seconded by Ms. Cruz. The motion carried by 3-0 vote.

Ms. O’Kane motioned to release the executive session meeting minutes from February 10, 2023. Seconded by Ms. Cruz. The motion held by 0-3 vote.

### **3. BUDGET AND FINANCE**

#### **A. Summary Report**

Ms. Stebulis stated all bills were on normal course.

Ms. O’Kane motioned to approve the payment of the attached list of bills. Seconded by Ms. Cruz. Motion carried by 3-0 vote.

*Mr. Roy arrived at the meeting at 7:39 a.m.*

### **4. GENERAL BUSINESS**

#### **A. Economic Development Bill Earmark Allocation**

1. Request to transfer funds to NewVue Communities

*Ms. O’Kane recused herself from the conversation and any vote.*

Ms. Donoghue updated the Board that she had spoken to Senator Cronin who requested the FRA consider transferring the earmarked funds to NewVue to help fill a gap in funding and bring the B.F. Brown project to completion. Mark Dolan of NewVue gave an overview of the project including that it will contain 68 apartments with a preference to local artist housing. Additional art amenities will also be within the building. They are aiming to close the financing gap by April 1<sup>st</sup>, and construction will take approximately 2 years, bringing completion to August 2025. This is a \$45 million dollar project and they are trying to close a \$2 million dollar funding gap at this time. The City has given \$250,000 via HOME funds, and Mass Housing and Mass Development are also assisting. Mr. Caron asked if this property is within our Urban Renewal district, and Ms. Donoghue confirmed that it was. Mr. Caron asked if we approve when work would start on the project. Mr. Dolan said their goal is to have the contractor mobilized on the site this Spring. Mr. Roy asked if they were unable to move forward until 100% of the funds were committed. Mr. Dolan confirmed.

Mr. Roy motioned to transfer earmarked funds to NewVue for use in the B.F. Brown rehabilitation project. Seconded by Ms. Cruz. Motion carried by a 3-0 vote.

*Michael Esposito and Phil Esposito arrived at the meeting at 7:57 a.m.*

Mr. Roy asked if NewVue would be the property manager once the project is complete. Mr. Dolan said that they will be hiring Wingate to be the property manager, who will work in collaboration with the Fitchburg Art Museum.

*Steven Cook and Mark Dolan left the meeting at 8:05 a.m.*

## **B. Proposal to Lease Suite 103**

1. Elmer Melendez to present

Mr. Melendez addressed the Board that he was coming in to start a conversation about the vacant Suite 103 and if they would be receptive to talking more about a business idea he has for that unit. He is envisioning a restaurant similar to Sweet Greens which would offer quick and healthy food options downtown. He likes our location in particular because of the abundance of parking and its centralized location. He is interested to know if the Board would work with him on a rent schedule and funding for the kitchen equipment. Mr. Roy stated that we are often flexible with leases based on our tenants' needs, but that we don't have any grants that would cover equipment costs. It is possible that the FRA could do a loan for the cost of the equipment. Mr. Caron added that he thought this was a great idea and that it is important to activate spaces along Boulder Drive and Elm Street, as well as Main Street. Mr. Melendez stated that he would like to come back to the Board in April with a formal proposal for Suite 103.

*Elmer Melendez left the meeting at 8:28 a.m.*

## **C. Proposal to Lease Suite 102 (Continued)**

1. Michael Esposito and team will present

Mr. Esposito provided proposed floorplan drawings to Board members. Mr. Caron asked if it's accurate that the pottery studio would be occupying approximately 2/3 of the space. Mr. Esposito confirmed. Mr. Roy asked if the kilns could be properly ventilated in that space. Mr. Esposito confirmed that they could with access to the loading dock area. He said adding the bathroom will be a bigger expense than the unit's ventilation, as they will be ventilating with two separate ducts, one for the lab and one for the pottery studio. Ms. O'Kane asked if the bathroom would meet occupancy code. Mr. Esposito stated that yes, their private bathroom and access to the public bathrooms meet code requirements. Ms. Donoghue stated that the next steps are for the Board to come up with a rent schedule and letter of intent, which will act as the template for their lease. Mr. Roy asked them if they had suggestions for wording of their sublease. Mr. Esposito stated that he didn't have an idea yet. Ms. O'Kane asked what their buildout time would be. Mr. Esposito said that would depend largely on the city's building department. Ms. Donoghue stated that LSP's will need to be on site and Mr. Esposito asked who is responsible for paying for that, and if there are any credits that can be added to their lease to help with that. Ms. O'Kane stated that we could work with them on that and she asked what lease term they are looking for. Mr. Esposito stated they were looking for a 3-year lease to start. Ms. O'Kane suggested that they get their desired terms and investment numbers together so that the Board can have a special meeting to discuss a rent schedule that will work for all parties.

*Michael Esposito and Phil Esposito left the meeting at 8:43 a.m.*

## **D. Main Street Housing Program**

1. 651-655 Main Street – 3 Units (\$15,000)

*Mr. Roy motioned to approve the Main Street Housing Program grant of \$15,000 for 3 residential units at 651-655 Main Street. Seconded by Ms. O'Kane. Motion carried by 4-0 vote.*

## **E. Putnam Place**

1. River Styx Request

Ms. Cullen updated the Board that their contractor has tried to push litigation, although their contract demands mediation first. They filed a motion to dispute on March 15<sup>th</sup> because the contractors LLC has been revoked and to force mediation per the contract. There is a hearing on March 31<sup>st</sup> to determine the next steps. She is requesting that the Board allow her to hold off on securing a lien bond until after the findings of the March 31<sup>st</sup> hearing to determine if it will be necessary. Mr. Roy stated that as long as they were following their lease, which Ms. Donoghue confirmed they were, that he was fine with this update and waiting until after the hearing to determine next steps in the lien bond process.

*Jackie Cullen left the meeting at 8:50 a.m.*

## **5. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT**

### **A. Business Administrator's Update**

Ms. Stebulis stated that she has spent a lot of time this month working with Tom Sozick to clean up the utility files and getting tenant billing up to date. She has also updated QuickBooks with our new 2023 Annual Budget and digitize all tenant leases on the FRA's OneDrive cloud account.

### **B. Executive Director's Update**

Ms. O'Kane asked if we are officially done with the project with Jim Coull. Ms. Donoghue stated that the unsigned P&S expired on January 31, 2023 and the deal is officially off.

Ms. Donoghue updated the board with recent discoveries of unknown chemical contamination at the sandpit site. GFI is still interested, but we need to determine what the substance is, how much there is and what that means going forward. The findings will be reported to the Federal Government.

Ms. Donoghue has written a letter of interest for Community One Stop funds for the repair of the roof on Building 3. She is also pursuing a Brownfields grant for the demolition of the power plant and reuse of the space for parking.

## **6. PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

Liz Murphy updated the Board that the City has accepted an offer to purchase and redevelop 491 Main Street. They have also accepted a proposal for 20 units of housing at the former Laurel Street School.

*Liz Murphy and Mary Jo Bohart left the meeting at 8:55 a.m.*

*Maribel Cruz left the meeting at 8:58 a.m.*

## **7. ADJOURNMENT**

*Mr. Roy motioned to adjourn the Regular Board meeting at 9:17 a.m. Seconded by Ms. O'Kane. Motion carried 3-0.*

**NEXT MEETING SCHEDULED:** April 18, 2023

Respectfully submitted,  
Sarah U. Stebulis  
Business Administrator