



FRA CONNECTOR

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HAPPY 60TH BIRTHDAY, FRA!

by Meagen Donoghue

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority (FRA). The FRA is a quasi-government agency created by then mayor, George J. Bourque, and City Council in 1964.

The FRA, like most Redevelopment Authorities operating in Massachusetts, was originally created to take advantage of the federal Urban Renewal Program, serving as a vehicle for conducting the federal mandate to eliminate blight from inner cities. Although the federal program no longer exists, Redevelopment Authorities, including ours in Fitchburg, continue to play a role in the Commonwealth's revitalization under Massachusetts General Law (M.G.L.) C.121B.

M.G.L. Chapter 121B allows municipalities, through their Redevelopment Authorities acting as urban renewal agencies, to eliminate and redevelop substandard, decadent, or blighted open areas for industrial, commercial, business, residential, recreational, educational, hospital, or other purposes. With the goals of revitalizing such land uses and encouraging new growth, Redevelopment Authorities have the power to:

- Establish rehabilitation and design standards;
- Assemble and dispose of land, including the taking of real estate through eminent domain;
- Relocate businesses and residents occupying urban renewal sites;
- Demolish and/or rehabilitate substandard structures;
- Participate in real estate development and commercial revitalization;
- Issue bonds, borrow money, and invest funds;
- Seek and receive grants and loans;
- Accept gifts or requests.



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Since its founding, the FRA has comprised of five Directors, four of which are appointed by the Mayor, and one by the Governor. Today, the Board of Directors meets regularly once a month, currently on Wednesdays at 7:30am, in the FRA's conference room, located at 166 Boulder Drive, Suite 104. All meetings are open to the public, unless otherwise stated as "Executive Session."



Thank you to those who came to the FRA's 60th Anniversary Open House! It was so great to see familiar faces and new ones too!

Looking back to 1964, Lyndon Johnson was president, and Urban Renewal was all the rage. But I bet Mayor George Bourque and City Council never knew what would be ahead of them when they created the independent entity known as the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority. With the decline of Main St., the closure of GE to name a few. During the past 60 years, the FRA worked to create the two industrial parks—one being Authority Drive, and the other on Industrial Drive. We acquired and redeveloped the former GE property, transformed a burned-up tire plant into what is now known as River Front Park, assisted with MART to construct the Intermodal station and brought the CVS to downtown.

We have some great projects in the pipeline including an RFP for the Johnsonia lot which is due on Monday, planning for highest and best use of our newly acquired 866 Main Street, and the sale of O Airport Road.

Besides our own projects, we have developed strong partnerships with many of the people including community stakeholders, developers and the local political delegation.

While we like to fly under the radar, we are a small but mighty group that you haven't seen then end of. It all cannot be possible without the incredible staff of business manager Sarah Stebulis, and facilities manager Bob Hasche. Also, we have an outstanding Board of Directors, Charles Caron, chair, Jay Roy, vice chair, Maribel Cruz, treasurer, and members Dr. Laura Bayles, and Laura O'Kane.



GRANT IT!

by Meagen Donoghue

The FRA has long awarded grants to small businesses within its Urban Renewal District to assist in activating vacant buildings. That initial grant was the Main Street Housing Grant which awarded \$5000 per upper story Main Street unit for a maximum of five units. In 2023, the program was expanded to up to ten units, per board approval. Taking further steps to expand the grant programming, the Design Grant was created, awarding up to \$2000 for any type of development design. For example, architectural drawings or sprinkler designs align this opportunity. This year, The Main Street Housing Grant changed names to **FRA Housing Grant** to encapsulate the entire Urban Renewal District. The **Design Grant** also changed its reach to across the city for commercial purposes only. In addition, a new FRA grant launched called the **Small Business Internet Grant**. This grant allows small businesses within the Urban Renewal District to apply for \$100 towards the installation or transfer of basic internet services. Should a small business want a package of for example Wi-Fi, phone, and internet, then the FRA will grant up to \$1000. All three FRA grants are only awarded as a reimbursement after the project has been completed.

In 2024, the FRA has awarded the following grants:

- **Design Grant - 1 Wood Place**
- **FRA Housing Grant - 409 Main Street**
- **Critical Systems Grant - 298-300 Main Street**



If interested in any of the three grant programs, please visit www.fitchburgredevelopment.com/services/financing, stop by the office to discuss, or call (978) 345-9602.

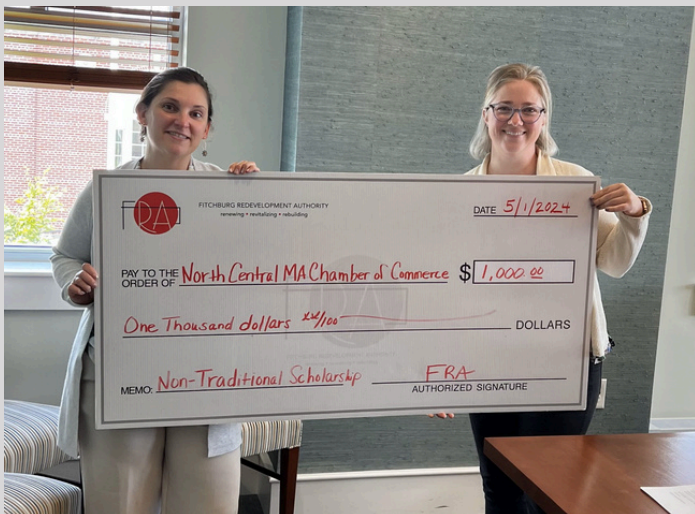
IT IS BETTER TO GIVE THAN RECIEVE

\$14,100 IN DONATIONS ~ 11 RECIPIENTS

With the winter holidays right around the corner, the old chestnut “It is better to give than receive” comes to mind for many of us. The FRA lives this year-round and 2024 was no different. To date the FRA has donated to the following:

- North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce - 2024 Non-Traditional Scholarship fund
- Fitchburg Civic Days - 2024 All Events Sponsor
- North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce - Annual Meeting Supporting Sponsor
- The Arc of Opportunity - 2023 Annual Charity Auction Bronze Sponsor
- Fitchburg Veterans Council - Bronze Sponsor for 10th Annual 5K
- Fitchburg Civic Days - Sponsorship for Trick or Treat on Main Street
- City of Fitchburg - Latino Festival El Primo Sponsor
- Rotary Club of Fitchburg - Sponsor of Breakfast for the Bands
- City of Fitchburg - Holiday Lights Clark Griswold Sponsor
- Fitchburg Art Museum - Patron Membership
- MOC (Making Opportunities Count) - 2023 Holiday Gift Distribution

We are always accepting requests for support of local events and organizations. Feel free to email requests to Executive Director, Meagen Donoghue at director@fitchburgredevelopment.com or mail them to our office: Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority, 166 Boulder Drive, Suite 104, Fitchburg, MA 01420.



FEELING ADVENTUROUS? HAVE WE GOT A BUILDING TO SELL (OR LEASE) TO YOU!

When the FRA received the former General Electric property on Boulder Drive in 1999, the property became the cornerstone of the 2020 Urban Renewal Plan. Much was done to the property including adding class-A office space to Building 2 and demolishing Building 1 and several other smaller, less notable buildings. With the former on-site steam plant set to be demolished beginning in 2025, what is left is the imposing vacant structure known as Building 3/200 Boulder Drive. Vacant since 1999, the FRA has had much interest in the building, but due to the complexity of bringing the structure up to code, many have walked away. With that said, the FRA has put Building 3 on the real estate market to either lease or sell. If sold, the owner will lease the land from the FRA on an agreed term.



If you have the vision and what it takes to reactivate the building in a way that will benefit the community, please contact FRA real estate representative **Tracy Sladen** from Aberman Associates, Inc., at tracy.realtor@verizon.net.



Let's stay in touch...

www.fitchburgredevelopment.com

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