
Special Meeting Minutes

Public Hearing

8-25-22

Redevelopment Agency

A Special Meeting of the **EAST HARTFORD REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY** was held in the Town Council Chamber at East Hartford Town Hall, and virtually, via Microsoft Teams, on Wednesday, August 25, 2022.

1. Call to Order

Chair McCreery called the meeting to order at 6:37 PM.

Present:

Ellen McCreery, Chair
Gerry Maine, Vice Chair
Tony Matta
John Ryan

Absent:

Others in Attendance:

Mike Walsh, Mayor
Richard Kehoe, Town Council Chair
Eileen Buckheit, Development Director
Richard Gentile, Assistant Corporation Counsel
Michael Daniels, Economic Development Coordinator

Goman & York team:

Mike Goman
Denise Robidoux

2. Public Hearing for the purpose of hearing public comment on the Town's consideration of acquisition by eminent domain, under a Connecticut General Statutes Chapter 130 Redevelopment Plan, of the following properties:

- 1) 794-810 Silver Lane. Tax Assessor's map/lot 45/130
- 2) 818-850 Silver Lane. Tax Assessor's map/lot 45/131

Chair McCreery opened the hearing to comments from the public.

Yuanlong Dai expressed concern for the future of tenants in Silver Lane Plaza and said the plaza has many active businesses and brings consumers to the area.

Judith Sheehan said she has an office in the building because she is required to have a location for Medicare and Medicaid. She said she does not want to relocate from her location in the office building on the property.

Catheine Lim said her dental practice has been succeeding after recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and fears negative impacts to the business if it is forced to relocate. She said it is one of few options as a Medicaid provider of dental services in the area.

Grace No said she is the daughter of the owner of New York Hair Salon in the plaza. She said she believes it is unfair to the tenants that the property owner has not invested to maintain the plaza. She said her mother wishes to stay in the current location and believes it would be difficult to find a new location and move if forced to do so.

Steve Tessier, the property manager, claimed he was authorized to speak on behalf of the owner. Mayor Mike Walsh responded saying that attorneys for the owner, based in Philadelphia, have said Mr. Tessier is not authorized to speak on behalf of the owner. Mr. Tessier said the large vacant space in the center building has been used for police K-9 training. He proposed negotiations to potentially sell the center building to the Town for demolition while maintaining the two other buildings under the current ownership. He said he would clarify his ability to speak for the owner and wishes to improve communication with the Town.

Beth Oman said she understands the plaza is not in the best shape but that she values the current businesses and wants them to remain located in East Hartford.

Slav Protas wishes for the two smaller buildings to be maintained so he can continue to operate his hair salon but agrees that the center building is deteriorated and should be demolished.

Clayton Corto, owner of Bare Bones Boxing, said his business wants to remain in East Hartford and serves the community through programs for CREC schools, the Department of Children and Families, and people with Parkinson's disease.

Karla Hahn said she hopes there will be future opportunities to have questions answered and hopes tenants can be notified of future hearings directly. Chair McCreery noted that the Redevelopment Agency meets monthly, and meetings are open to the public.

Tien Nguyen of Pho House also asked for tenants to be notified of hearings directly. Atty. Gentile asked to be recognized and asked Mr. Tessier to provide the Town with a roster of tenants so that they can be contacted directly in the future. He noted that the property owner and owners of all properties within 100 feet were notified of this hearing, in accordance with state statute.

Hernan Todd of Living Word Imprints said he has seen business increase recently as people learn about his business. He said he likes his location and wants to see the plaza grow and flourish.

Mayor Mike Walsh said the plaza is severely blighted and no new investment is planned. He noted that many of the speakers acknowledged the plaza is in bad shape. He said the Town has hired two appraisers for independent appraisals of the property. He clarified that the Town wishes to protect the businesses and keep them in the plaza if possible, and that this is a distinct issue from the decision of whether to acquire the property by eminent domain.

Town Council Chair Rich Kehoe agreed with Mayor Walsh and said he wants to see the existing businesses stay. He said if the Redevelopment Agency and Town Council agree to acquire the property by eminent domain, there would be no immediate impact on the tenants. The Town would become their new landlord. He said if the buildings were to be demolished, the businesses would not necessarily be forced to leave the property, and the Town would assist in finding new locations if necessary. He said Leon Chen purchased the property based on speculation that a casino would be located nearby but has never invested in the property. He said the property has become the face of East Hartford for visitors to events at Rentschler Field and to Cabela's. He said it makes it difficult to convince people that the town is a vibrant commercial place.

Mr. Tessier said that the current ownership had invested to replace HVAC systems in the plaza. He said the ownership had secured a lease with a larger Asian market, but it was contingent on renovations that the plaza could not afford. He said environmental cleanup costs and the Town's unwillingness to financially support the renovation made it impossible to afford the renovation.

Ms. Nguyen said she sympathized with the owner having difficulty in being able to renovate the property amid the COVID-19 pandemic and said the ownership had put effort into improving the Pho House's unit. She does not want to have to relocate.

3. Adjournment

Motion made by Mr. Maine to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Matta, approved 8:56 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Eileen Buckheit
Development Director

cc: Town Clerk
 Development Department