

Town of East Hartford

Development Department
740 Main St., East Hartford, CT 06108
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Special Meeting Minutes

10-27-22

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 Thursday, October 27, 2022.

1. Call to Order

Chair McCreery called the meeting to order at 6:31 PM.

Present:

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

Absent:

Others in Attendance:

Mike Walsh, Mayor
Eileen Buckheit, Development Director
Michael Daniels, Economic Development Coordinator

Mike Goman, Goman & York
Don Poland, Goman & York
Michael Andreana, Pullman & Comley

2. Approval of Minutes

Approval of minutes of regular meeting, 9-21-2022.
Motion by Mr. Ryan, seconded by Mr. Matta, approved.

3. Vote to Incorporate Minutes from August 25, 2022 Special Meeting into Record of October 27, 2022 Special Meeting

Vote to incorporate minutes from August 25, 2022 Special Meeting into record of October 27, 2022 Special Meeting
Motion by Mr. Ryan, seconded by Mr. Matta, approved.
Minutes of the August 25, 2022 Special Meeting are incorporated with these minutes as "Attachment A"

4. Public 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**

Don Poland of Goman & York began the public hearing by presenting an overview of the Silver Lane Redevelopment Plan. He explained that Goman & York identified a substantial amount of deteriorating and deteriorated conditions in the study area. The plan identifies strategies for addressing these conditions, including lists of priority properties for acquisition and additional opportunity properties for potential future redevelopment. He explained that the Redevelopment Plan built upon previous studies, including the 2018 Silver Lane Revitalization Plan. The Planning & Zoning Commission incorporated this plan into the Town's Plan of Conservation & Development.

Dr. Poland also shared a findings memorandum from July 20, 2022, which provided required findings to adopt the Redevelopment Plan, and a findings memorandum from October 18, 2022, which provided required findings related to the use of eminent domain.

Mayor Mike Walsh thanked the Redevelopment Agency members for their efforts and welcomed additional comments from the public. He reaffirmed that the Town will provide assistance to Silver Lane Plaza tenants. He said that the Town cannot allow itself to be defined by the current condition of the plaza.

David Case said he lives near the plaza and sees it as an eyesore. As a longtime East Hartford resident, he has seen it deteriorate over the years.

Sarah Lapean said she likes the businesses in Silver Lane Plaza, but she believes the owners have not taken enough care of their property. She supports the use of eminent domain and hopes the tenants will get nicer locations as a result.

Eileen Driscoll said she thinks the plaza is ugly. She believes eminent domain is necessary.

Deb Arrietta said she found it embarrassing that attendees of a funeral for two police officers that recently took place at Rentschler Field had to see the deteriorated conditions of the Silver Lane corridor. She is in favor of moving forward with eminent domain.

Veronica Rosario said that while she has lived in East Hartford for a shorter amount of time than many of the previous speakers, she often hears people talk about what East Hartford once was. She wants to change the focus to what East Hartford should be in the future. She said the Town should take advantage of the current moment with ongoing redevelopment and supports using eminent domain.

Former Mayor and State Senator Tim Larson said he strongly supports using eminent domain for Silver Lane Plaza. He has many memories of the plaza dating from childhood, and he often thinks about what the area could be like in the future. He believes moving on from the plaza's current state is necessary to allow younger generations to see their vision of a future East Hartford.

Hank Pawlowski also talked of memories of the plaza, saying it was only in good condition when he was a very young child. He said it has been sad to see the plaza deteriorate over the years and supports the Town taking ownership of the plaza by eminent domain.

John Murphy said his priority is attracting new businesses and jobs to East Hartford, and he believes revitalizing the Silver Lane corridor will help to do this and to restore civic pride.

State Representative Henry Genga said he patronizes businesses in the plaza including the Five Star Cleaners. He said he is careful to avoid potholes due to the deteriorating conditions of the parking lot. He believes redeveloping Silver Lane Plaza to give a positive first impression of East Hartford, especially for developers who are interested in the area. Because the current owners have shown they are incapable of moving forward with redevelopment of the plaza, he supports the use of eminent domain.

Sue Kies said she lives on Silver Lane and has seen the plaza deteriorating over the years. She wants eminent domain to go forward because the current owner has not shown a willingness to redevelop or sell it otherwise.

Town Council member Don Bell said he has appreciated listening to residents' thoughts on the topic. He said he has childhood memories of the plaza as well and that, unfortunately, nothing has changed at the plaza since then. He understands that tenants have invested tremendously into their businesses and understands the weight of using eminent domain, but he believes it is necessary. He highlighted the necessity of supporting the tenants so that they can remain located in East Hartford.

Celine Sauve said she agrees with prior comments about helping finding plaza tenants new locations. She said the neighborhood has become a dumping ground for garbage, including on Applegate Lane and at Charter Oak Mall. She supports the use of eminent domain.

Chris Guarez said he is a greenways advocate and believes Silver Lane Plaza has been dragging East Hartford down. He said he could not support a greenway trail passing by the plaza in its current condition.

Vanessa Jenkins said she is glad that the process is moving forward and believes the plaza is a blight.

Town Council Chair Richard Kehoe said the process builds upon many prior studies on Silver Lane and that eminent domain is necessary in order to achieve the future vision that has been developed for the neighborhood. He said the Town wants to find a developer who will build something consistent with this vision on the property. He said the Town is committed to working with the existing businesses and that the Town Council is prepared to vote on acquiring the property by eminent domain at their next meeting if the Redevelopment Agency approves its use.

Chair Ellen McCreery invited the public to speak on the matter during the public comment portion of the Town Council meeting as well.

Steve Tessier, the property manager, said that the ownership group had put effort into improving the plaza, but they needed to remediate contaminated soil from a prior dry cleaning tenant. He said that a larger grocery tenant had been planned in past years, but the Town was unwilling to financially support renovations that were necessary for the tenant to move in. He claimed that the Town had not had enough discourse with the ownership group to determine if they could come up with a resolution that would allow the current owners to continue to own all or part of the property.

Mike McDonald said that it is clear to him that nothing will change under the current ownership.

Tien Nguyen of Pho House said that she does not support the use of eminent domain and would like to hear more details about how the current tenants will be assisted if they need to move to new locations.

Chair McCreery closed the public hearing at 7:43 PM.

Chair McCreery reopened the public hearing at 7:45 PM.

Rosamond White said that Silver Lane looks badly deteriorated and that the plaza's property manager has no power to do anything, and the owners do not have enough money to do anything. She said that she would not want to rent

a unit in the plaza under its current conditions and believes the owners are just trying to get more money from the Town.

Chair McCreery closed the public hearing at 7:46 PM.

5. Review and Action

a. Consideration of acquisition by eminent domain under C.G.S. Chapter 130 Redevelopment Plan of 794-810 Silver Lane, Tax Assessor's map/lot 45/130 and 818-850 Silver Lane. Tax Assessor's map/lot 45/131.

(i) Discussion of Public Comment

Mr. Maine said that while he is normally against eminent domain, he has been convinced by the large number of people speaking in favor of its use that he believes it is necessary.

Mr. Matta said he has been encouraged by the passion of the business tenants who have spoken. He sees opportunities for Silver Lane's future. Like Mr. Maine, he usually opposes eminent domain, but he believes it is necessary in this instance.

Mr. Ryan said that he agrees with Mr. Maine and Mr. Matta, especially about the passion of the tenants. He noted that no authorized representative of the ownership had attended either of the public hearings to speak directly about their positions. He noted that while eminent domain is not always the best tool, he believes it is required in this instance.

Chair McCreery pointed out that the owners will still receive a fair market value for the property with the use of eminent domain. She has pleasant memories of the plaza from the past, but she said the plaza is no longer pleasant. She reiterated Mr. Ryan's point that the ownership had not sent an authorized representative to the Public Hearings. She believes the Redevelopment Agency has no better option than to use eminent domain to acquire the property.

Attorney Michael Andreana of Pullman & Comley, acting as counsel to the Town, clarified that the Town of East Hartford has not mandated any actions and that the Redevelopment Agency has been free to consider whether or not using eminent domain to acquire Silver Lane Plaza makes sense based on the findings and public comments.

(ii) Discussion of required findings pursuant to Statute, including presentation and discussion of Certified Planning Consultant's Report

Eileen Buckheit read from Dr. Poland's October 18, 2022, findings memorandum, explaining that he found that the benefits of acquiring the property by eminent domain to the public would outweigh any benefits to any private entity, the current use of the property under its current conditions cannot be feasibly integrated into the overall redevelopment plan, and the acquisition of the property by eminent domain is reasonably necessary to achieve the objectives of the redevelopment plan.

(iii) **Deliberation and possible vote on acquisition of each parcel by eminent domain, including possible referral to Town Council for vote.**

Mr. Ryan read the following resolution for consideration:

Resolution to Approve Acquisition by Eminent Domain Pursuant to a CGS Chapter 130 Redevelopment Plan.

Whereas, the East Hartford Redevelopment Agency (“Agency”) has previously approved the Silver Lane Redevelopment Plan: Chapter 130 Redevelopment, prepared for the Town of East Hartford, CT dated May 25, 2022 (“Plan”), by Goman and York Advisory Services (“Goman”);

Whereas, the Agency has held at least one public hearing, heard public comment on, and considered all public comment regarding the potential acquisition by eminent domain, under the Plan, of the following properties: 794-810 Silver Lane (Tax Assessor’s Map/Lot 45/130) (the “794-810 Silver Lane Property”) and 818-850 Silver Lane (Tax Assessor’s Map/Lot 45/131) (the “818-850 Silver Lane Property,” collectively with the 794-810 Silver Lane Property, the “Silver Lane Properties”);

Whereas, the Agency has reviewed the two appraisals for each of the Silver Lane Properties prepared for the Town and the Agency, understands the conditions of, conditions affecting, uses, and other salient facts and characteristics of the Silver Lane Properties;

Whereas, the Agency has (I) considered the benefits to the public and any private entity that will result from the redevelopment project set forth in the Plan and determined that the public benefits outweigh any private benefits for each of the Silver Lane Properties, (II) determined that the current use of each of the Silver Lane Properties cannot be feasibly integrated into the overall redevelopment plan, and (III) determined that the acquisition of each of the Silver Lane Properties by eminent domain is reasonably necessary to successfully achieve the objectives of the redevelopment plan, these findings were made, in part, with the assistance of, and after consideration of, the memorandum prepared by Goman dated October 18, 2022, and presented to the Agency at its October 27, 2022 Special Meeting;

Whereas, the Silver Lane Properties are not being acquired by eminent domain for the primary purpose of increasing local tax revenue;

Now Therefore Be It Resolved, based on the foregoing findings and facts, the Agency having made the requisite findings and otherwise complied with CGS 8-127a, hereby approves the acquisition by eminent domain, under the Plan, and pursuant to the powers of CGS Chapter 130, of 794-810 Silver Lane (Tax Assessor’s Map/Lot 45/130) and 818-850 Silver Lane (Tax Assessor’s Map/Lot 45/131) and moves said approval of acquisition to the agenda of the Town Council for its review and vote; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Agency shall cause notice of its approval to acquire the Silver Lane Properties by eminent domain to be published in a newspaper having substantial circulation in the Town of East Hartford not more than 10 days after this approval.

Chair McCreery asked if two separate motions were necessary for the two parcels. Atty. Andreana clarified that because the resolution clearly identifies both parcels, only one motion on the resolution is necessary.

Motion made by Mr. Matta to approve the resolution as read by Mr. Ryan, seconded by Mr. Maine, approved 4-0

6. Adjournment

Motion made by Mr. Maine to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Ryan, approved 8:08 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Eileen Buckheit
Development Director

cc: Town Clerk
 Development Department

Attachment A
Minutes of August 25, 2022 Special Meeting

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

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- 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.

Catherine 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