

**City of New Bern
Board of Aldermen Work Session
October 14, 2020 – 6:00 p.m.
City Hall Courtroom
300 Pollock Street**

Mayor Outlaw opened the meeting with prayer. The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Roll Call: Mayor Dana Outlaw; Aldermen Sabrina Bengel, Jameesha Harris (via telephone), Robert Aster, Johnnie Ray Kinsey, Barbara Best, and Jeffrey Odham. Absent: None. A quorum was present.

Also in Attendance: Mark Stephens, City Manager; Brenda Blanco, City Clerk; and Jeff Ruggieri, Director of Development Services. Members of the Redevelopment Commission in attendance: Theresa Lee, Chair; Jaimee Bullock-Mosley, Vice Chair; Tabari Wallace; Steve Strickland; Kip Peregoy; Maria Cho (via telephone); John Young (via telephone); Robbie Morgan (via telephone).

Mr. Stephens announced this joint meeting with the Redevelopment Commission ("Commission") was requested by the Board of Aldermen.

1. Discussion with Redevelopment Commission.

Alderman Bengel said the reason for the meeting was to obtain an update from the Commission and discuss the transfer of property. She explained there are three categories of properties: 1) residential properties owned solely by the City of New Bern, which the Board is ready to transfer to the Commission at the Board's next meeting; 2) residential properties jointly owned between the City of New Bern and Craven County, which would require the County to release their tax liens and transfer their ownership; and 3) commercial property (site of former Days Inn).

Mrs. Lee explained the Commission had formed three subcommittees to review specific areas, and Commissioners would report on their respective committees. Vice-chair Bullock-Mosley provided an overview of each committee. She noted the Neighborhood Committee was working on community cleanup, attacking visible elements to make sure the community was safe, and building relationships. The Health Committee had been collaborating with NC Central University ("NCCU"), a historically black university in Durham, to identify ways to help with the public health issues and concerns that exist in the Greater Duffyfield community. The Housing Committee has worked diligently to identify properties for creating and rehabilitating housing stock.

The Commissioners then provided the following reports for each subcommittee:

- Housing Committee: Mr. Peregoy said the committee had been working on rehabilitation, new housing opportunities, and elimination of blight. He

explained the need to have a business plan to ensure that the Commission has a return on its investment, could continue to grow that money, and reinvest it into other projects. The Committee has tried to identify properties in Duffyfield that the owners may be willing to sell. Mr. Strickland said the committee was also looking at strategic partnerships. Mr. Peregoy expressed a desire to see homeownership increase. He said 76% of the area's residential structures represented rental properties, and a lot of the blighted properties were rentals. The more homeownership and buy-in into the community, the better everyone will be. Mayor Outlaw suggested the City may be able to partner with the Commission from an electric enterprise standpoint with respect to energy efficient homes. Mr. Ruggieri pointed out one of the charges of the Commission is to make sure homes are energy star efficient. He stated they are also working on a program to allow City Inspectors to enter all residential homes within the redevelopment area to analyze energy efficiencies. The Commission is collaborating with Habitat for Humanity on energy efficiency designs.

- Neighborhood Committee: Reiterating the need for community buy in, Mr. Morgan stated a sense of community was returning to the neighborhood simply because of the community cleanups. Residents felt important and were taking pride in their properties. Mr. Wallace echoed Mr. Morgan's comments and stated there was a sense of energy in the community.
- Health Committee: Mrs. Cho provided a health update, noting the Commission had been working with NCCU to provide a lecture series over five months. The primary focus is to look at social aspects of race, individuality, politics, inequities, and disparities, all of which are related to health on a more comprehensive level.

A map of the Commission's boundary was displayed to highlight the City-owned parcels that are proposed for transfer to the Commission. Mr. Stephens said the City Attorney would work with the County on transferring the properties that are jointly owned by both governments. At the Mayor's request, Mr. Stephens described the history associated with tax foreclosure of heir properties. He pointed out there are several properties that fall into this scenario and are still pending.

Mayor Outlaw asked about the possibility of in-kind water or sewer grants through the Community Development Block Grant ("CDBG") program. Mr. Ruggieri explained the problem is homes must be owner occupied, and most of the properties that have issues are rentals. There are also income limits associated with the CDBG program.

Mr. Ruggieri said the Commission is currently focusing on properties that are considered "low-hanging fruit" – outside of the floodplain, in relatively good shape, and owned by someone willing to sell. The goal is to rehabilitate these properties to a higher standard of energy efficiency and livability, and then rent the properties to establish an income stream for the Commission. After addressing the rentals and cash-flow needs, the Commission will start to concentrate on homeownership.

It has been a long time since a market home sold in Duffyfield. Mayor Outlaw expressed a desire for the Commission and Governing Board to meet with the homebuilders and Board of Realtors to discuss partnering.

(Mayor Outlaw left the meeting at 6:44 p.m. Mayor Pro Tem Aster presided over the remainder of the meeting.)

Alderman Odham inquired as to the Commission's biggest challenge thus far. While everything has been moving in a positive direction, acquiring the property to build upon or renovate has been the biggest trial, per Mr. Ruggieri.

Alderman Bengel said the conveyance of the City-owned residential lots would be on the next agenda, if amenable to the Board. Alderman Odham said he had no concern with the transfer, but questioned how many of the lots would actually be buildable. He asked about the intentions with respect to the McCotter House. Mrs. Lee said the hope was to have a health center in that structure. Mr. Stephens suggested the Commission investigate the potential utilization of the auxiliary building on Trent Court's campus, which is owned by the Housing Authority. Alderman Best questioned whether the McCotter House could be converted into two or three apartments, and Mr. Ruggieri responded it could not because of its current zoning. Alderman Odham questioned whether the McCotter house should be added to the list of properties that are conveyed at the Board's next meeting, and the Board expressed consensus with doing that.

(Alderman Kinsey momentarily stepped out of the room at 6:58 p.m.)

Alderman Aster suggested the adjacent owner to the McCotter house be approached about selling their property.

Mr. Stephens said he and the City Attorney would promptly move forward with meeting with Craven County to discuss the County transferring their interest in the jointly-owned properties. Some of those properties are buildable lots.

(Alderman Kinsey returned to the room at 7:01 p.m.)

Alderman Bengel noted the Days Inn property was not being conveyed to the Commission. Developers have been reaching out about the site, most of whom have tax credit funding and want to build high-rise affordable housing. Noting the location is situated in a commercial corridor, Alderman Bengel felt it important to have the property developed commercially. She suggested the Commission handle the vetting of the development and subsequently make a recommendation to the Governing Board. If the Board agrees with the recommendation and so desires, the Board could then convey the property to the Commission. Alderman Aster expressed a desire to see a grocery store on the site. Mr. Stephens said it would be difficult to get someone interested in that area without incentives. Mr. Ruggieri said it would take working with a co-op. Alderman Odham said he did not disagree, but since the property had been vacant for 20 years, at some point in time consideration must be given to accepting an 80/20 development.

Noting the property was the heart of the community, Alderwoman Harris thought any development at that site would need to impact the community and that the community should have input in the decision. Mrs. Bullock-Mosley asked Alderwoman Harris if she would provide information on the those who had expressed interest in the property so the Commission could begin having conversations with them.

Referencing Alderman Odham's earlier question about obstacles the Commission faced, Mr. Peregoy voiced one of those was the fact that the Commission was a volunteer board. Some of the work the Commission performs is quite involved, and the Commissioners have personal jobs. He recognized City staff for the assistance they provide to the Commission.

Noting Alderman Bengel had expressed a lot of her desires, Mr. Strickland asked the rest of the Board about their wishes for the Days Inn property. Alderman Aster suggested the community be polled and move forward in the direction of their desire. Mr. Peregoy commented how the coffee shop, Crema Brew, was thriving and how the right business on the Days Inn property could also work and would be supported. Alderman Best stated she would not specify a percentage of required commercial or residential use, but she supported a grocery store and bringing other businesses into that area. After reiterating that the area was starting to thrive and would continue to thrive, she felt it was ultimately up to the community to let the City know what it wanted. Mr. Stephens suggested maximizing the commercial use of that property. Alderwoman Harris felt it would be a great idea to market the property and let the developers present their ideas, pointing out that the developers would do the necessary research to determine what would work. She was in favor of a combination of commercial and residential use. Mr. Ruggieri described the type of incentives that could be offered to developers, noting the Governing Board was limited in what it could offer, but the Commission could offer more. Mr. Stephens reiterated the Board wanted the Commission to bring the best option to the table for the Board's consideration. Mrs. Cho asked if there would be focus groups so the community stakeholders could provide their input. Mrs. Lee said the Commission would talk about that in their meeting.

(Alderman Kinsey left the meeting at 7:34 p.m.)

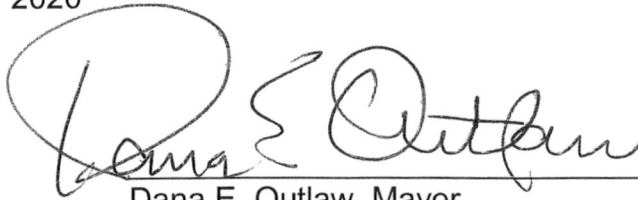
In response to Mrs. Cho's question, Mr. Stephens said the Choice Neighborhood Initiative contained a lot of information, and he would hate to waste the time and money that went into that plan.

2. Adjourn.

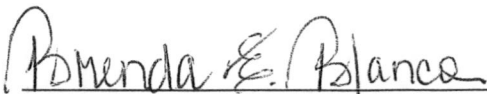
Alderman Odham made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Alderman Best. The motion carried unanimously 5-0, time being 7:37 p.m.

NOTE: For additional details and information on the Board of Aldermen meetings, please visit the City of New Bern's website at www.newbernnc.gov. Video and audio recordings of the meeting have been archived.

Minutes approved: October 27, 2020

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Dana E. Outlaw", written over a horizontal line.

Dana E. Outlaw, Mayor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Brenda E. Blanco", written over a horizontal line.

Brenda E. Blanco, City Clerk