

City of New Bern
Redevelopment Commission Meeting
April 14, 2021
303 First Street- Development Services

Members Present: Chair Tharesa Lee, Co-Chair Kip Peregoy, Maria Cho, Steve Strickland, Beth Walker, John Young, Julian Tripp, John Young, Leander Morgan, Tabari Wallace

Ex-Officio Members Present: Alderwoman Sabrina Bengel

Members Excused (E)/Absent (A):

Staff Present: Jeff Ruggieri, Director of Development Services; Amanda Ohlensehlen, Community and Economic Development Manager; Alice Wilson, GIS Manager; Nadia Abdul-Hadi, Planner I; D’Aja Fulmore, Community Development Coordinator

1. Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Tharesa Lee called this meeting to order at 6:00 PM and began with roll call and the reading of the Commission’s guiding principles.

2. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the January 13, 2021 and March 10, 2021 meetings were presented and approved by Commissioner John Young and seconded by Commissioner Leander Morgan.

3. Public Comment

Citizen Reggie Jones stood to thank Jeff Ruggieri, director of Development Services, for his hard work, along with thanking the Commission for their efforts to inspire community engagement.

The following citizens were in attendance for this meeting:

- Ethel Sampson
- Barbara Sampson
- Reggie Jones
- Scott Harrelson
- Elijah Brown
- Mike Williams
- Antoinette Boskey

4. Ujima Development/Dr. Leon Caldwell (Zoom)

Jeff Ruggieri, director of Development Services, explained to the Commission that developer, Dr. Leon Caldwell of Maryland, will be assisting with the housing plan for the Commission. Mr. Ruggieri stated that Leon will be in New Bern on April 30th and will be in the community walking around on May 1st. Mr. Ruggieri told commissioners that Dr. Caldwell will be helping

cultivate a vision for a new housing program and has been brought in to engage with community leaders and conduct strategic visioning sessions.

After Mr. Ruggieri's introduction, Dr. Caldwell greeted everyone and introduced his business partner, Gudell Ward. Dr. Caldwell stated that Ujima Developers was founded based upon a principle for how he looks at community change and transformation. Dr. Caldwell told the Commission that the *ujima* is a Swahili word that means "collective work and responsibility". Dr. Caldwell explained that he began his career as a professor at the University of Nebraska and was recruited out of academia to go into philanthropy. Dr. Caldwell told the Commission that he has previous experience working as senior researcher and conducting community engagement work. Dr. Caldwell explained that he launched his company as a response to thinking about development as an intervention point, a place where humanity exists and where people are in position to change their own lives. Dr. Caldwell explained that he believes in teaching people how to fish and uses development models that incorporate two main strategies- economic mobility and health and well-being. Dr. Caldwell expressed the importance of the two and how they are oftentimes not the only thing missing but tend to be missing when government or public health systems come to intervene. Dr. Caldwell expressed that he has found that true exchange of accountability and engagement is the healthiest approach in creating sustainable communities. Dr. Caldwell added the need for support services as being essential to the infrastructure of a neighborhood, taking the healthiest approach in making sustainable communities and incorporating holistic models for communities. Dr. Caldwell expressed the importance of moving citizens from Public Housing to homeownership and breaking the cycle of poverty. Dr. Caldwell explained that his work is centered around creating a housing system that does not perpetuate the cycle of poverty and instead increases homeownership as a technique for wealth creation. Dr. Caldwell applauded the Commission for their efforts to improve the community and stated that the Commission's level of engagement is unique.

Commissioner John Young asked Dr. Caldwell what his current experience tells him that is different from what has been done before to address these kind of community issues. Dr. Caldwell responded, stating that in the past, the Federal Government did not have support and robust capital to make the necessary changes. Dr. Caldwell also explained the history of this country and the impact redlining has created. Dr. Caldwell stated that there is now more diversity amongst developers and the intent is different. Commissioner Leander Morgan asked Dr. Caldwell if he had worked in markets similar to the size of New Bern. Dr. Caldwell stated he had not worked on any projects in Eastern North Carolina and had done a lot of work in larger cities. Dr. Caldwell explained that while poverty may look differently in different communities, it functions the same. Dr. Caldwell stated that he plans to engage with the community and find out what they want. Dr. Caldwell explained that while working with the New Bern community, he would be as detailed as finding out if they want duplexes, porches, and more. Lastly, Dr. Caldwell explained that low-moderate income families will not be cheated out of high-quality design.

5. North Carolina Central Lecture Series Discussion/Health and Wellness Working Group (Zoom and In Person):

Commissioner Maria Cho greeted Dr. Livingston of North Carolina Central University (NCCU). Additionally, Commissioner Cho provided a background on working with the college for the purpose of community engagement. Dr. Livingston expressed excitement about opportunity to work with the City of New Bern and the importance of the lecture series, as it will provide a necessary historical basis that will highlight African American culture and how it has been impacted. Citizen Reggie Jones stood to explain how he will engage a younger audience to get them involved with what the Commission is doing and increase participation in attendance for the lecture series. Jasmine Bethea of NCCU stood to explain that the lecture series is part of an effort to take a holistic approach to healing for the community prior to engaging and empowering them with how to succeed.

Crystal Taylor of NCCU stated that the lecture series will be vital to understanding health disparities and knowledge of what practitioners should look for and what citizens should look for. Ms. Taylor explained that the lecture series will help entertain and educate, get people engaged, and inspire wellness. Ms. Taylor explained that the African American population has received habits from past generations that have resulted in poor diet. Through the lecture series, Ms. Taylor explained this will be addressed, teaching the target population how to focus on retraining the mind and body. Ms. Taylor stated that eating healthy is not a luxury but is a human right.

Dr. Bridges of NCCU stood up in agreement about what has generationally been passed in the African American community as it relates to food consumption. Dr. Bridges explained that as part of the lecture series, he will speak on anxiety and depression and how the African slave ships contributed to many health issues we see today. Ms. Taylor added that NCCU would like to know how this content can be delivered. Alderwoman Barbara Best stated that Juneteenth would be a good time for something like this in the community. Before closing this section of discussion, the Commission agreed to coordinate with NCCU to find the best approach to delivering the series.

6. Committee Updates

Commissioner Cho gave an update on the Neighborhood Clean-Up Event that will take place in partnership with Habitat for Humanity on May 1, 2021. Commissioner Cho explained that the event will feature a cookout and resource fair that will be held at the Omega Center for residents to come out and enjoy. Commissioner Cho presented the list of agencies expected to attend, with a collective representation of approximately 20 agencies.

The Commission moved forward to discuss the Housing Subcommittee updates, where Mr. Ruggieri discussed potentially exploring property over in the Walt Bellamy community. Mr. Ruggieri stated that this will potentially give the Commission another solid development site. Mr. Ruggieri told commissioners that the lot located at 911 Eubanks Street has been surveyed and he plans to contact someone regarding the foundation. Mr. Ruggieri stated that he anticipated the home being moved within the next 60 days by Elite Structural Movers and the back portion of the home is still needing to be removed. The Commission discussed there being no need to place restrictions on the property at 1213 Mechanic Street. The Commission concluded a request

will be sent to the Board of Aldermen that will grant permission to sell. Mr. Ruggieri reminded the Commission that property purchases can always take place but selling property will always need Board approval.

Attorney Jaimee Bullock-Mosley explained that the purpose of approval is for the Board of Aldermen to determine that the sell is supported by the Redevelopment Plan. Attorney Jaimee Bullock-Mosley also stated that the Redevelopment Commission can place conditions on the property, but to be enforced, it must be objective. Commissioner Kip Peregoy stated that the Commission needs to ensure that the transaction is not extremely restrictive.

Commissioner Beth Walker made a motion to present a resolution to the Board of Aldermen for the sale of the property located at 1213 Mechanic Street. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Young. The motion carried.

7. Old Business/New Business

No new business was presented at this meeting.

Chair Tharesa Lee adjourned this meeting at 7:30PM.

Date approved: May 12, 2021


Tharesa Lee, Chairman

Attest: 
D'Aja Fulmore, Recording Secretary