

Jonesboro Land Bank Commission
Minutes for Tuesday, May 10, 2022
City Council Chambers, 300 South Church Street, Jonesboro, AR

Note: We will follow guidelines for public meetings per the Arkansas Department of Health.

1. Roll Call

Present: Jeffrey Herndon, Corey Mills, Dennis Zolper, Gabe Roberts, Amanda Eaton, Drew Waddell, Bob Warner, Monica Pearcy/Planning, Heather Owens/City Attorney

Absent: Jay McLeod

2. Finding of a quorum

Chair Warner affirmed there is a quorum. Chair welcomed new members of the commission and thanked them for being here.

3. Approval of Minutes

A. April 12, 2022 – no corrections or discussion

A motion was made by Jeffrey Herndon to approve the minutes, seconded by Gabe Roberts. The motion PASSED unanimously.

4. Old Business

A. 700 Cate Avenue Title Search

Senior Planner Monica Pearcy said at the last meeting it was discussed that there had been a title search on the property and City Attorney's Heather Owens looked further into that. Heather Owens said there was a notice of lien filed by Christian Construction against the property back in 2019. She does not believe any lawsuits were ever filed and she thinks the statute of limitations on that lien has run out, and it should not, in her opinion, be enforceable. If that is the only lien on the property, she doesn't think it will be an issue.

Monica Pearcy said the owner did agree to donate the property sometime in the future. The owner is working on selling some other properties and said when she is finished with those, she will sign the donation application. Chair Warner asked if the commission is basically waiting on the owner. Monica Pearcy confirmed.

Chair Warner asked if he remembered correctly the commission voting as a body to accept the donation. Monica Pearcy said they have not voted, waiting for the owner's signed document. Heather Owens recommended that the commission wait until they have all the information and documents in front of commissioners before voting. Dennis Zolper was not currently present and Heather recognized that he usually has a lot of pertinent questions that is very helpful. She would prefer to wait until they commission has all the information and get

Mr. Zolper's input. Chair Warner acknowledge that the donation is basically on hold but that he would think if the donor does want to donate it would be the pleasure of the commission to take it into their inventory and dispense of it accordingly.

B. Railroad-Owned Property

Monica Percy said that at the last meeting, they had spoken of two properties which Burlington-Northern Santa Fe Railroad owns – one on North Bridge and one on North Drake. There was a motion made to get in contact with the railroad company to see if they would be interested in donating. That is still in progress so hopefully by the next meeting, there should be more information or an agreement worked out.

Chair Warner said as additional information, the city i.e. "Tony & Brian" (Tony Thomas, Chief Operating Officer and Brian Richardson, Chief Administrative Officer), are currently talking to the railroad about several properties. He suggested we reach out to see if there's some common ground there.

C. Bus Tour

Chair Warner said they've been waiting for the new commissioners to come on board to take a bus tour of properties around the city. As background, when the Land Bank was first started several years ago, one of the first things done was a bus tour of the city and determined areas where could concentrate on, which were the north side, Nettleton area, and the west end. They've been hoping to have another bus tour to include the new commission members to see first-hand some of the issues. Chair Warner referred to Monica Percy regarding plans. A potential plan could be that at the next scheduled Land Bank meeting, the commission to meet at council chambers, for a few minutes to go over plans and then go on the bus tour. Chair Warner said if they have any business to conduct, they could go over it at the beginning of the meeting prior to the tour. They plan to invite city council members who may want to go, and allow any press who might want to go. He said they could map out some areas, to get a feel for all three aforementioned areas plus anything else that may need to be looked at. He suggests that as a commissioner, if there are any particular areas of the city they'd like to see, they should reach out to Monica so it can be added to the tour. Monica agreed and said she'd love to hear any of the commissioners' ideas so there can be a route mapped out. Chair Warner said they should allow at least two hours to complete the tour, maybe more.

D. Other

Chair Warner suggested at the next meeting, they discuss the property at Front & Bridge, where a house had burned. He asked if the owners had been located. He would like for the commission to approach that. To keep everyone updated and new members informed, Chair Warner asked Monica to show the property in question. She referred to a printout in front of commissioners, with a yellow crosshatch area shown already owned by the land bank. Chair Warner pointed out that the railroad runs across the bottom of the page. Chair Warner pointed out 106 N Bridge that he had referred to (surrounded by land bank-owned property)

and said 107 North Drake is interesting in that it was owned by the land bank at one point and sold it back to someone to refurbish it and it has been refurbished. There has been some serious conversation with the church at 125 North Fisher which owns that entire block, about what they might want to do with their properties. It is his understanding that the way the church works, they have a conclave of bishops nationally that come here to make decisions about their properties. He believes they will be in town in the near future. He said if you look farther down Front Street, there are the Veteran's Village & the Wolverine World Wide properties, so they should view all that on the bus tour.

Commissioner Drew Waddell asked how much involvement the commission gets to have as far as the development of these properties. Chair Warner used, as an example, a pilot project which went quite well where they bought a property on Warner, got it very inexpensively and sold it to a contractor who refurbished a century-old house with a lot of history to it, and now it's back in housing stock as a very viable residence for someone.

They had a little discussion if he remembers correctly, about the bonding of contractors. In Arkansas commercial contractors are required to be bonded – residential contractors are not. When they first started – he referred to Heather Owens – they required that all their contractors be bonded. This was all pre-Covid pandemic. Now that we are up and running with regular meetings again, we probably will have a request for interested contractors to be certified and there's a process in place for that. Maybe the board can look at that next meeting. But that's the extent of the commission's control.

They do have the ability to negotiate liens off of the property and make the property more viable. They also have the ability to put covenants on the property so that it can be used in a certain way, so as it passes through the land bank, if there is a desire to develop a property in a certain way, they have the ability to do that. (Dennis Zolper had arrived to the meeting about this time & was updated on what he missed.) A commissioner asked if the city could develop a property. Chair Warner replied they are able to but I think we have steered away from the city becoming the contractor. We want to keep at arm's length in that setting for obvious reasons. If a contractor defaulted, the land bank would not want to be responsible and be the contractor, so we try to arrange it so that doesn't happen. Commissioner Zolper agreed.

Chair Warner said another thing that is on the horizon is there is an inventory property (referring back to the question of the city developing a property), there are two tiers of property – the property like where this meeting is being held, that the city uses – but there is an inventory of property out there that could be developed. Before the land bank there was not a vehicle for managing that property. Monica Percy, Senior Planner, will soon be taking the test to become a licensed real estate agent and is doing that partly because of the Land Bank Commission. Once that happens, that inventory can be managed through the land bank. There's been no formal action taken on it, but that has been the discussion with the Mayor's office.

5. New Business

A. New Commissioner

As former commissioner James Hollywood has accepted a job in Little Rock and moved outside of Jonesboro, there is another vacancy for a commissioner. There are currently two people who are interested – Ms. Daisy Freeman and Rusty Clark have both shown interest. Chair Warner said they are both upstanding people who have given their time in the past in volunteer roles for the community. Heather Owens is going to look into making a proposal but they may want to consider even adding an additional commissioner. There is a process with that and can be brought up again at a future meeting. Heather Owens said she's not sure. The number of commissioners is set by ordinance and may have to be amended by an ordinance as opposed to just a resolution. She will find out. Chair Warner said if it needs to be an ordinance, they should reach out to council members just so they know what they intend and be sure they go through all the proper and legal channels.

6. Public Comments (3 minutes per person)

7. Adjournment