



## **MEETING MINUTES**

### **Lealman Community Redevelopment Area Advisory Committee Meeting Wednesday, November 15, 2023, 6 PM**

**Committee Members Present In-person:** Steve Cleveland, Jeremy Heath, Jennifer Post, Kim Blessinger, Oscar Seguban, Charles Flynt, Marsha McCoy

**Committee Members Absent:** Dominic Howarth

**Pinellas County Staff Present:** Tom Almonte, Felix Nunez, Tanya Kurtin, Scott Swearengen, Derrill McAteer (Virtual)

#### **I. Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Steve Cleveland

#### **II. Introductions**

Each Committee member and County Staff member present made introductions.

#### **III. Citizens' Input**

Community Resident David Lee had a statement. He stated, " I'm a resident here in the CRA, and you know I have been gone for a while, but I am back now and just really shocked, as I was telling your assistant county administrator, with the decision to get rid of Chris Moore. You know, if you were to choose one thing that you could do as a county government to single-handedly screw over this community, you would take, and you would melt the glue that was holding the whole thing together, guy was here from the beginning, and you would torch that, and that's exactly what happened. So, you know, I know a lot of people in the county and in the community, and so I've been asking around and calling around, and what happened? And the funny thing is, no one has an answer because everyone says the same thing is that he was one hell of a nice guy and one hell of an advocate for us people living here. And so, you know, I've been saying it all along. But Pinellas County, you guys are so far away, you have absolutely no idea what's going on here. And this is just more evidence of it. It's really just sad. It's very sad. It's a huge setback. And I'd love to understand it more. But, you know, all I've heard is that it's politics. And that's very unfortunate that the people that live here have to suffer because of whatever politics are going down there. Going on down there. Fourth Street. Very disappointing".

#### **IV. Approval of Minutes**



Jen Post stated she was not able to approve the minutes for September 27 as they are. There was a discussion about the lighting in the park with the Public Works and the use of the multi-use space. We agreed to update those minutes and approve them at the next meeting if they are updated to the committee's satisfaction.

## **V. Lealman CRA Updates**

### **Housing and Community Development-Form-Based Code Update from Scott Swearengen**

All county-wide plan requirements, amendments, and public hearings have been met. Amendments that were proposed were presented to the Board of County Commissioners, and they unanimously approved them. Finally, we have our final set of public hearings scheduled for December 12 with the Board of County Commissioners as a sixth hearing; those are our last two public hearings to adopt the form base code as part of the land development code and to adopt the amendment to the zoning Atlas, which maps the form base code on to the zoning. And those are the two final hearings. The effective date for the code to go into effect is January 1.

Steve Cleveland asked for clarification of what was included in the form-based code. Scott answered that it consists of a segment of 54th Avenue N., 34th Street N., the entirety of Haines Road, and a small portion of 28th Street just north of Joe's Creek. Steve asked about other sections of Lealman, including Joe's Creek. Scott replied that they were strategic in what areas would go first and that this was phase one.

Steve Cleveland mentioned voting on the master plan to move forward with it. So that's where all that's coming from, and until a month ago, there hasn't been much that we can even entertain or propose in the Joe's Creek industrial area because of the county-wide plan rules and the way they were written. Scott reminded Steve that those rules had been amended and that there was the TIEL study, which targets employment industrial lands study, a very exhaustive study where consultants and experts came in to help understand our various industrial areas. They came up with recommendations, and the county-wide planning authority implemented those. We have the opportunity now to take a closer look into those areas. That's what the Joe's Creek master plan is; that's a project that we have budgeted for this new fiscal year that was just voted on and will focus on.

### **Public Works – Update of all Construction Transportation Projects – Rob Meador**



Mr. Meador gave the committee updates and was prepared to take questions. Charles Flynt asked about 54th Avenue North 49th Street to 34th Street. His question was about being able to potentially fit sidewalks on both the north and south sides of 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue due to the amount of people around here who do not have vehicles. So, there's heavier sidewalk usage. But there were constraints regarding the right way to work with alternatives C and D. Do these alternatives allow for the sidewalks on both the north and south sides of the roadway? Mr. Meador responded Yes. Mr. Flynt asked, and it also allows for the median.

Mr. Meador responded that what we're looking at is a flush median. So, you're looking at a five-lane section with a center to a turn lane. For safety reasons, we would look at pedestrian refuge islands. Mr. Flynt clarified that he was speaking about continuous flush lanes so that people do not block the left lanes when making a left turn, which slows down traffic and creates safety issues. He asked, but then again, we also have the question we did in the prior meetings years ago: didn't we have enough width there to put in that flush median and have the sidewalks? So now it does incorporate all that? Mr. Meador responded that both those alternatives do that if you notice the difference in the alternatives of languages. He also mentioned that the Fire Chief has grave concerns about the width of the roadway with the lines, so they're going back and looking at what can be done with 11-foot lanes through versus the 10 10 and 10-and-a-half-foot lanes. They are looking at what other right of way impacts they will have some right of way acquisition through this to perform the project. Some with the narrower lanes a little bit more with the wider lanes. Looking at that, is it best to widen to Northside? Or is it best to enlarge symmetrically, which would cause a right-of-way impact on the north and south sides of 54th Avenue? They are looking at different alternatives.

Steve Cleveland mentioned the concerns with the fire department; Mr. Meador assured Mr. Cleveland that he and his Director, Mona Gabriel, have spoken with Chief Graham several times recently.

They are still going through evaluations and, hopefully, within the next month to two months. The consultant is going to have information for the department to be able to decide.

Tom Almonte added that he and Mona have met with Achieve, the consultant, and they are aware of the concerns and working through it.



Mr. Flynt also had a question about 62nd Avenue north from 49th Street to 34th Street. This had a lot of public meetings 15 years ago. Is it still looking to go to a four-lane with a flush or raised median? Mr. Meador let him know that, at this point, it is not looking at that type of white stripes. They are looking at a three-lane section center fairway.

Charles Flynt asked about 54th Avenue North at 62nd Street at the park. Rick explained that this is going from a strain pole with span wires to concrete because they are not storm worthy in the condition they are, so it is being changed over to concrete for stability.

Steve Cleveland asked for an update on 54th Avenue and 37th Street crosswalks. It's been talked about several times getting moved because when people come across RT19 and 54<sup>th</sup> Ave., they drive very fast, making it difficult for bicyclists and walkers to get there. There have been discussions about moving that crosswalk farther west towards the county property at Lealman Park. Mr. Meador stated he would investigate it.

Jeremy Heath had a question about the 46th Avenue storm system. He wanted to know if it would be curb and gutter or [sewer](#). Currently under construction, 46th Avenue does have a curb and gutter. Mr. Heath also wanted to know what pavement preservation means to 58th Avenue. Because of the heavy construction, are they replacing the pavement and covering the gutters? The answer was that pavement preservation is the term given to resurfacing roadways to preserve the pavement and the whole roadway structure. That is an unimproved roadway. It's had asphalt chips put down to harden it, keep the dust down, and help prevent some of the long-term maintenance. Some drainage improvements are being designed as a part of the improvement of their project. [They are](#) not looking to close all the digital pipes but to analyze what drainage needs to be fixed. They stated they could provide more information on this.

Mr. Heath also encouraged the county's plans for 54th Street not to be swayed too much by simply the fire department's wishes because the narrower lanes give opportunities for more space for other businesses and slow down the traffic in healthy ways. He agrees with their original concern about the median straight down the middle being an issue. He agrees that if that concession has rightfully been made, there will still be opportunities to pass.

Kim Blessinger had a question about constructing 42nd Ave N from 46th Street to 35th Street. She stated that it looks beautiful and is transforming the feel of the street and that she is excited about the completion of it. She said some houses appear slightly lower than the street



from 43rd Street to 42nd Street on the north side. She is concerned that the sidewalk will be where the ditches are and that water will be built up there because there's nowhere for the water where it used to go. She wanted to know if it had been noticed and addressed. She was advised that, yes, it has been addressed and remedied.

### **CRA FY24 Work Plan – Tom Almonte**

Mr. Tom Almonte provided an update on the CRA FY24 Workplan.

He announced the Second Annual Christmas Tree Lighting by the Lealman Engagement Committee is scheduled for December 1.

He announced the increased Residential Improvement Program grant amounts to \$15,000.00. He discussed the new flyer created for the program and that the CRA staff would be marketing it to the community.

The work plan also included funding for a new lighting system for Lealman Park. The design work begins with the staff, but the committee can see it and provide input. Although \$200,000.00 was allocated, a \$75,000.00 grant has been submitted to help offset the cost. We should know by the end of the year if the grant was awarded.

\$250,000.00 was allocated for the Master Plan for Joe's Creek. The work should begin next year, and the committee will be included.

Mr. Almonte discussed the success of the Florida Dream Center and Island Way in executing the Alley Maintenance Program. He advised that their contracts end in March and that the RFP is out for a new contract that will identify vendors for the next contract to continue the successful work of the alley maintenance program.

Steve Cleveland asked if money could be allocated to fix the sign board in Lealman Park. Jen Post agreed and added that one on the opposite side of 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue would also help share information with the community. Mr. Almonte promised to look into this and see if we can include these additions with additional grant money.



Jeremy Heath asked why the CRA Home Rehabilitation Program funding was removed from the work plan. Mr. Almonte stated that the program was very similar to the one we have at the county level and was a duplicate. To be more intentional in spending our dollars, we decided to concentrate on those programs we don't have in housing and community development. The effort was made to focus on the Residential façade grant program increase and commercial grant programs.

Mr. Heath was concerned that that cut the budget to Lealman by almost 20%. Mr. Almonte confirmed that those funds go back into the CRA fund balance. It stays with the CRA. It will be beneficial as we go into Joe's Creel Master Plan and the Stormwater solutions that need to be addressed in 2025 and 2026 so the money will be well allocated.

Jen Post stated that if we are spending money on lighting for Lealman Park, why aren't we able to provide lighting for Neri Park? Mr. Almonte replied that he would look into the lighting opportunities at Ray Neri Park. He stated that one of the things the staff thinks through is that Lealman Park is very open. Everyone can see the park, but Neri Park is more closed off.

Jen Post stated that there is an entranceway to Neri Park off 46<sup>th</sup> that you can get in through, even if the park is closed and dark. So, there are safety issues. If somebody comes in, it's a risk management issue for the County, even if the park is posted as closed if somebody were to come in, and it's pitch dark, and something happens. Based on the earlier discussion that the parks are from Dawn to Dusk if Lealman Park can get lighting and stay open later, but all parks are from Dawn to Dusk, can't Neri Park get lighting as well? She wanted to make note of that loophole.

Steve Cleveland stated that there were already lights in Lealman Park, and that was the only place to play basketball until the Lealman Exchange opened. He also noted that the light in Neri Park might be a disturbance to the residents at Duvall.

Jen suggested there could be a switch for the lighting and that it could only be used for events. If you need them, you turn them on; if you don't need them, you don't turn them on.

Kim Blessinger made a point that during the winter months, it would be fair to use light and keep the park open until 8:30 as it is during the summer months. Having sufficient lighting would enable the park to be used consistently by residents year-round.



Kim Blessinger also asked if the new park being installed would have any shade covering. Mr. Almonte said he would look into it and let the committee know.

**VI. Members – terms ending in 2023.**

Mr. Cleveland Stated that there were members whose terms were ending on December 31, 2023, and if anyone is interested in renewing, they need to submit their applications to be reapproved. He stated there is already one vacancy that also needs to be filled. He said applications need to be submitted quickly as the applicants must go before the County Commissioners acting as the CRA board for approval.

**VII. Approval of the 2024 Lealman CRA Advisory Committee Meeting Schedule**

The committee votes to approve the 2024 CRA Advisory Committee Meeting Schedule. Jeremy Heath made the motion to approve. Kim Blessinger seconded the motion. The committee unanimously approved the motion.

**VIII. Selection of 2024 Chair and Co-Chair**

The committee decided to table this vote until January to select the new chair and co-chair. Charles Flynt made the motion, Jen Post seconded the motion, and the committee unanimously agreed.

**IX. Advisory Committee Member Comments**

Oscar Seguban, who is retiring from the Committee, said his goodbyes. He stated, “I would like to say my goodbyes. It's been a privilege to serve the County and Lealman. I want to thank all those civil servants, police officers, fire departments, and professionals who came and worked along with the CRA as well as all my fellow members. I'm proud of what we achieved, and I am proud of the strategic changes that were delivered to the county commissioners for consideration. I'm sure you guys will keep up the good work. Thank you”.

**X. Adjourn**

Kim Blessinger motioned for the meeting to adjourn. Jen Post seconded the motion. The committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 7:05PM

