



## MEETING MINUTES

### Lealman Community Redevelopment Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, January 24, 2024, 6 PM

**Committee Members Present In-person:** Steve Cleveland, Jeremy Heath, Jennifer Post, Kim Blessinger, Charles Flynt, Dominic Howarth

**Committee Members Absent:** All members Present.

**Pinellas County Staff Present:** Tom Almonte, Felix Nunez, Tanya Kurtin, Bruce Bussey, Scott Swaengen, Jason Ester (Virtual)

#### I. Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair Steve Cleveland

#### II. Introductions

Each Committee member and County Staff member present made introductions.

#### III. Citizens' Input

Mr. David Lee, Lealman Resident, Provided Citizen Input – “A couple of notes on the agenda. First, I would acknowledge and thank whoever did the minutes from last time. They're very comprehensive and good, but they might not seem like a big deal. But what you learn over time eventually is that the county is going to do whatever the county is going to do. And so often as a community, what we're left with is strictly just some words, and it is nice to have that memorialized, at least on the record that when whatever happens there was some debate, discussion, and perhaps consent, on whatever that item was. So, thank you to whoever did that. And with the exception of the St. Pete group, which provided a really comprehensive file, I don't see anything but memos on these other two items. It's especially concerning because of the cases referenced here. And there's no case file, there's no background information. And that's something that most boards would typically get ahead of time to review those items. And you know, this board is lucky to have the talent that we have. A member of DRC, we have people who get into the details of projects like that, so they come prepared and, you know, ready to ask important questions, and I don't see that, so I see one reference to the, I assume, Boley Development. Is that right? Okay. So just quickly with Boley, it's important for the board to realize that the community had two choices. And it was 60%, Ami, ex-offenders or 60%, Ami Boley disabled. So those were the choices we had to make. And I just mentioned that (Committee member Heath asked Mr. Lee if he was on the selection committee) yes, I was on the selection committee. One of the bids was from our chairman, Steve; the other bid was from Boley. First, I would say, Boley is an outstanding developer; their projects are top-notch. They provide a a well needed service. But if you look at that



neighborhood, what that neighborhood needs are owners and maybe mixed income. And that was the county's position. And so, to see, the county decided for us that we don't need mixed income, we don't need owners, and we need more renters. And on top of that, now, non-wage-earning renters. That's disappointing that this happened because the county incentivized the lower AMI. if you look all around the country and state, everyone's doing mixed-income because that's how neighborhoods get better. And that's exactly what we needed on that side of the neighborhood. That's the last place you should do a 60% Ami project. And so, I hope that moving forward, you know, we can look at the neighborhood's needs and incorporate that into the RFQs moving forward. Thank You”.

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

Chair asked for motion to approve Minutes from September 27, 2023, and November 15, 2023 Jeremy Heath Motioned to approve, Charles Flynt Seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously. Charles Flynt commented on detail of notes and hopes to see more detail in the future.

#### **V. Lealman CRA Updates**

##### **Lealman Exchange Updates**

##### **Amy Cianci - Lealman Exchange**

- Kitchen Project – The first Phase is complete; they are still fundraising for Phase 2.
- The outdoor basketball courts are complete and open. They are open during basketball hours at the exchange. Due to security issues, they are open to the public only through the exchange during gym hours, not through the park.
- Security upgrades are complete. Full rehaul of security system, including video systems and courtyard lighting.
- Increased facility use – Community space has seen a 200% increase in usage.
- Collective impact—We are nearing the end of year 2 of the project. We developed a partnership of over 80 organizations, including nonprofits, educational groups, the fire department, and the sheriff's office, working to make LEX the heart of the community.
- Tenant collective: Meets every six weeks to update on building operations, cross-program overlap, and collaboration where possible.
- Collective Impact guiding group—a high-level group that meets every six weeks to formulate early ideas for large-scale projects at the exchange.
- The activation board is the larger meeting, with 95 invitees and an average attendance of 35 to 45 people. It consists of resource sharing and discussion on a specific topic, such as marketing or social media, with a subject matter expert who will present and give pointers and tips.
- Special events include Reading with the Rays, SPCA and Pinellas County Animal Services quarterly pet clinics, STEAM education day in partnership with Jacobs Engineering,
- Ongoing programming – Open gym basketball. Open gym pickleball, Silver Sneakers,



Parkinson's movement class, cardio drumming,

- Resources – The full-time needs navigator in partnership with the St. Pete Free Clinic, the HIGI machine in partnership with the American Heart Association, Soft Sills training class, and a computer room with introductory computer courses.
- Partner programs – AmSkills
- Upcoming Events – Honey and Arts Festival, NACA homebuyers Workshop, Poverty Simulation event, AARP Shredding event.
- Upcoming partnerships: The Community Foundation of Tampa Bay, The YMCA, the St. Petersburg Foundation, and Pinellas County will team up to provide swimming lessons and lifeguard certification to Lealman children.

Jen Post asked for more information on the poverty simulation event and the target audience. Amy explained it's more of a business-to-business experience for people who work with the population (caseworkers, providers, etc.) or who may indirectly interact with people in poverty (teachers i.e.).

### **Housing and Community Development Updates**

**Bruce Bussey** discussed the ranking of firms and an agreement with Pinellas Affordable Living, Inc. to develop affordable housing at 3901 46th Avenue North in the Lealman Community Redevelopment Area.

The project used to be the Woodacres mobile home parks. Acquired by the county as part of the planned redevelopment to remove a problematic property in poor living conditions twofold. The county issued a request for proposals to redevelop that site. There was a challenge of the triangular shape, one-and-a-half-acre parcel. The county did receive two proposals, and both were evaluated. The top-ranked proposal was submitted by Pinellas Affordable Living, which is a development component of the Boley organization.

Boley has about 160 units they've developed over the past 25-30 years they've built for Special Needs clientele. They're proposing a 17-unit apartment complex, utilizing the site efficiently. Community Development has prepared two items for the Board of County Commissioners for consideration at the January 30th meeting—approval of the ranking of the proposals and conveying of the property to the Housing Finance Authority. Housing Finance Authority will then lease the land to Boley, and Boley can apply to The State of Florida for affordable housing development financing. It has taken several months to get to this point; the resource allocation to develop the project is estimated to be \$5.86 million for development.

Boley is known for doing good construction, ownership, and management work. Community Development is confident this will be a good project. In a few months, there should be an update on some success regarding financing. Those applications are due to the state in March, so possibly in April or May, there will be a good idea of whether there has been success with



securing financing, which will be one of the biggest hurdles to moving forward with this project.

Committee Member Kim Blessinger asked if this is considered temporary housing. Bruce advised that it is long-term permanent housing with income limits at 60% AMI. Boley would be charging reduced rents, but it's not free rent.

Committee Member Jeremy Heath asked if it had taken a year and a half (from the original ranking) to secure financing. Bruce explained that they first had to demonstrate site control, which wasn't in place when the last financing cycle arrived. They couldn't go to the state for financing and had to work through all the steps to obtain site control before applying for financing at the next cycle, which is now in March.

Mr. Heath also stated that he was on that committee, and every member was concerned about 60% Ami and much of Neri Park's development. This construction will be happening on 46<sup>th</sup> Street, and they only have two options. He thinks it's worth saying publicly that "everybody on that selection committee is hoping that in the future Lealman attracts a little bit more, I think, you know, even to Mr. Lee's point, you know, a little bit more mixed-income, as opposed to always being the Give me your tired, poor and weary. Because the concern is this, although this is without a doubt, there is no question, an improvement upon the original property owners and a huge improvement upon the proposed development a couple of years back, we can do better. I would say that that would be my only comment on the development other than acknowledging that, yeah, a lot of Boley's work elsewhere, and the company itself is well known for being good quality, so like with Lealman Heights eight years ago, the county acquiring the property. We still don't have any buildings on the property; it's just a little concerning that we're having difficulty securing financing because I understand that that's been part of the delay for Lealman Heights. I know it's two separate projects. But I would hate for that to be another. I don't want it to be 2028, and we're still having the same conversation".

Jennifer Post agreed with Mr. Heath's and Mr. Lee's comments but also wanted to point out that we are in a major housing crisis. Her concern is that she is unfamiliar with Boley, so she wants to know how the rental process works. Will there be a procedure to ensure it doesn't turn into another drug house or another slum apartment building? While we are trying to build up Lealman, kudos for the fact that we are providing housing for those that are on dangerously low incomes, but how are we going to be assuring that the property is going to be well taken care of and the tenants are going to be taken care of?

Jeremy Heath replied that Boley has high standards and is known to be quick to evict troublesome tenants to maintain a decent property.

Steve Cleveland suggested that Boley come and speak to the committee.



Charles Flynt asked how long their agreement with Boley had been. Bruce advised that the county has entered a 99-year ground lease with Boley. It has all the standard restrictions and requirements and is renewable for another 99 years.

Charles Flynt diverted into a conversation about code violations. He wants to know if the CRA advisory committee as a group can report code violations to be able to remain anonymous.

Tom Almonte said he would invite Code Enforcement to the next meeting to discuss ways the community can get involved in calling in code enforcement violations so that they can remain anonymous or discuss other options.

Jennifer Post asked what would happen if Boley Center sold its building. The county has the right of first refusal, so it could acquire the building or approve the sale. Either way, the restrictions would stay in place but could be renegotiated.

**Scott Swarengen** - Case No. FLU-23-08 (Igor Melnichuk) This is a request for a Future Land Use Map amendment from Residential Low to Residential Urban on approximately 1.02 acres at 3320 70th Avenue North in Lealman.

Proposal for a future land use map amendment within the Lealman CRA, going to the Board of County Commissioners for public hearing and request to adopt the changes at the end of this month on January 30. The property is 1 acre in size. It's a future land use map change from residential low to residential urban zoning R4. The owner wants to build townhomes on the property. Current regulation allows the owner to build 5. The owner wants to build 8. Needs to amend the map to the Residential Urban category to do so. It is a matter of density. Site plans have not yet been submitted.

There has been no opposition and one inquiry.

Steve Cleveland asked what the size of the townhomes was, addressing that you can only put so many square feet on a piece of property, including parking and drainage. Scott said that was still unknown as they needed to submit site plans. Scott confirmed they would have to meet all zoning and stormwater requirements before having their site plans approved. They would be required to make some off-site improvements to have their site plan approved. This will be presented to the BCC on January 30<sup>th</sup> for a Public Hearing.

Kim Blessinger asked if they were going to be for rent or sale. Scott answered that it is unknown at this time. The developer has expressed that he intends to develop consistent and appropriate property in accordance with the area's policies and in compliance with zoning requirements. So, there is no knowledge of whether it will be rented or owned.



Steve Cleveland asked if this parcel fell under the Form-Based Code. Scott confirmed that it does not fall within the Form-Based Code zones.

Charles Flynt commented that townhomes are maximizing the number of buildings and minimizing the amount of parking space. His concern is that they are maximizing the amount of building space and minimizing the amount of parking pass space. He feels “They take what could be a nice project beneficial to the neighborhood. There is more code enforcement in unincorporated county areas, and everything is spilling onto the streets. People tend not to use garages for cars. So, everything spills in the street, as in the Lealman area. There are nicely done homes with a single-width 10-foot-wide driveway that fits one vehicle. It's a nice house, all dumped up because everything's parked in the front yard now because there's no place to park. If we go from a five-unit complex, that will typically give them a little more maneuvering room not to have that exterior junkyard feel. If they maximize the number of units and do not necessarily consider the aesthetics of the property and how those vehicles are parked, my only concern is having functional driveways to keep this from spilling into the right of way and parking on the landscaping. That's my only real concern overall”.

Scott stated that's a valid concern and that townhomes are in our code. They fall under single family. They're not detached single-family residential, but they're single-family residential. Most townhome developments generally fall within 10 to 12 dwelling units, and he does not think this will be a concern. Regardless, the developer must provide a site plan, like any other development would. They'll need to provide the drive space, and they'll need to provide adequate parking where they'll meet all those parking requirements, separation requirements, and all the other things you'd normally have to meet in a single-family residential zoning district.

Mr. Flynt asked if the committee could review a site plan before approval. Mr. Almonte promised to investigate the Building and Development Review Services process for submitting the design as part of the site plan review process and what role the committee can play. They may not be able to change it, but at least they may be informed about the design.

Committee Chair Steve Cleveland gave community resident Amy Cianci the floor. She asked how they were going to manage parking if there was not enough space in the alleys. Scott again explained that everything would have to be planned out once site plans were submitted, and no one would be approved if adequate parking and right-of-way accesses could not be demonstrated in the site plans.

Committee member Jen Post asked if the Land Use change was for the area adjacent to the acre or just that one-acre lot. Scott clarified it was just for that one lot.

**CRA Workplan Updates –**



Tom Almonte provided CRA updates.

- Residential Improvement grants
  - o Increased from 10K to 15K due to increases in the cost of materials and labor.
  - o 8 new applications
  - o 13 in progress
  - o 3 have been completed
  
- Commercial Improvement Grants
  - o 1 new application
  - o 5 projects in process
  - o 1 project complete
  
- Home Investment Program (Habitat for Humanity)
  - o 3 new applications
  - o 3 applications waiting for payment

Upcoming events

Honey and Arts Festival – Feb 10

New Staff

Amy Davis, New Assistant to the County Administrator, Starts February 12

## **VI. Advisory Committee Member Comments**

Jeremy Heath asked for the comments section to be changed before the election. He also asked Steve Cleveland not to comment on the topic due to a conflict of interest regarding his topic, The Florida Dream Center. His comments, verbatim, are as follows:

“In November, I was informed that the county is essentially gifting the property that the Dream Center is currently on to them, which is fine. We all know the good work that the training center does, but I hope this is showing consistency because I have always shown consistency. So please understand that this is not personal. However, we have, time and time again, had projects or purchases or whatever done in Lealman, and we've requested that we be informed about it. And it's my understanding that the closing date is next Friday. And this never once came before the CRA Committee. It was never discussed; there was never the acknowledgment of a potential conflict and the waving of the conflict, which we have done in the past with no problems. My understanding is that the property falling within the CRA boundaries should be subject to an RFP, and it was not, which is a Florida State statute. This is a \$1.6 million gift/sale, whatever you want to call it, which is 70% of our operating budget. It falls within the Lealman Heights district when the original Lealman Heights sale went through. It went through the CRA. I have all the articles in which Mr. Neri and Commissioner Justice are quoted. Neil was quoted. So, for that transaction, the CRA was heavily involved, and I'm very





uncomfortable with the fact that the CRA is not involved with this and that we appear to be cutting in line. And if we are cutting in line, that's fine. I feel like we deserve an explanation. So, I would propose a vote for a recommendation that we delay the sale or the transaction of the property until we are given time to properly give our input and evaluate what has happened over the years. It's been for months, and I only learned about it in November. So, I'm very disappointed. I'll pull up an article from when the Oasis Acres thing went down. As you know, Tom, the last thing that you said was any project proposed in Lealman will be subject to an initial review by the CRA committee. We have increased transparency, which was put there to make sure we can mitigate something to be approved that maybe the community doesn't support. And I'm not at all. I don't want to say that I, you know, support or don't support the sale; we just weren't informed. Just digging through all this, I have been given tax returns, emails, letters to the State Attorney General, and complaints of what happened when DND sold to the county and that transaction from start to finish. Think of how long we've been involved in some projects. In some cases, there's something as simple as the swim lesson thing. You know, I think that was first proposed two years ago. We're thrilled it's happening, but things in government take time. The DND sale from start to finish was ten weeks, and it was a \$4 million sale. And the individual still running things Jacob Stowers was responsible for Oasis Acres. Members of the DND board went in front of the county commission, saying maybe we should pump the brakes. And I have proof: the gentleman can sue me; I know for a fact 100% fact that 3.5 million of the \$4 million went directly into the pocket of the executive director of DND missionary homes. And the DND committee was trying to put a stop to it. That gentleman has used four Christian nonprofits, including Hannah Grace Homes, which was the former site of where the Florida Dream Center is today. They robbed those charities blind. They then were sued in 2021. I promise I have the receipts. They were sued in 2021 for trying to do a hostile takeover of an RV dealership where they were using the funds from the RV dealership and siphoning money from the RV dealership into their nonprofits. They stole three and a half million dollars. Those two men not that it's anybody's business, but those two men on DND's board are married. In December of 2021, they bought a million-dollar house in Gulfport together with both of their names. It was absolute and complete corruption, complete corruption, and there are people in Spain who gave me half of these documents, Spain! who held on to this stuff for eight years and are that sore about it. I want to be very, very clear, very clear. I am not implying anything like that is happening today. However, soreness and bad feelings still exist in how those sales were handled. I want to ensure we are aboveboard and transparent with the sale today. So that's my soapbox speech. But I would propose a motion to delay that sale. Until we have an opportunity to have everything presented to us."

Tom Almonte responded to Mr. Heath's comments. The BCC received approximately \$185 million of ARPA dollars. They set aside about \$10 million for nonprofits to apply. Those dollars were designed for nonprofits wanting to acquire a property or make improvements to it. That process was managed by an independent entity that the county hired; they made a recommendation to the board, and the board could view all the recommendations. One of





those entities was the Dream Center; they applied for \$1.8 million grant. It was to acquire and upgrade the property, so the BCC reviewed and approved the request. After approving the one point eight million dollars, the board reviewed and approved the sale of that property with the \$1.8 million dollar grant they've received. So, the BCC has reviewed not only the initial request of the grant but also an independent review. They then reviewed the request to sell the property to the Dream Center, which has been reviewed. The BCC has taken three or four separate actions, just because the most recent one was to approve the sale of the property for \$1.195 million. The grant dollars won't go to the Dream Center directly; they will be transferred to the county from the Grantmaker to acquire for the Dream Center to acquire property. The remaining \$600,000 is used to improve the facility. The YMCA and other area nonprofits have also received several million dollars, so it was an open process that the BCC took to make available to all the nonprofits in the county.

The debate continued. Mr. Heath is still dissatisfied with the situation. Mr. Almonte conceded that he made an excellent point, apologized, and stated that we should have brought this to the advisory committee as an upcoming piece of business and the decision the board was making regarding the parcel of the property earlier.

Mr. Heath still feels the committee is not properly involved and questions if his time is wasted attending these meetings.

Mr. Almonte promised to improve communication but assured everyone that the process was open and transparent.

Mr. Almonte welcomed any committee member to sit with the CFO or county attorney to discuss these transactions.

Tom assured the committee members that he would provide them with copies of the agreement with the Florida Dream Center and the grant approval documents.

Kim asked if an agreement had been made to bring this issue before the advisory committee. Mr. Almonte stated that better communication was promised, and he believes it has. She asked if there was something that could be worked on to determine some parameters as to what should be brought forward to the committee to review and discuss.

Charles Flynt suggested that any sales of Pinellas County property within Lealman or long-term leases be disclosed. This will help avoid any signs of impropriety in the future.

Final comment after the election: Jennifer Post asked about the enhanced ditch maintenance and what it will entail. Tom Almonte made a note of this.

***You can request a copy of the audio file to listen to the recording of the entire meeting.***

## **VII. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair for 2024**



Kim Blessinger nominated Steve Cleveland and Charles Flynt to remain as chair and vice chair.  
Dominic Howarth Seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

#### **VIII. Adjourn**

Kim Blessinger motioned to adjourn the meeting; Charles Flynt seconded. Approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:52PM