



## MEETING MINUTES

### Lealman Community Redevelopment Area Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, June 26, 2024, 6 PM

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

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

**Pinellas County Staff Present:** Amy Davis, Felix Nunez, Jason Ester

#### I. Call to Order

Vice Chair Charles Flynt called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

#### II. Appointment of New Chair and Nomination/Election of new Vice-Chair

Amy Davis explained the rules: When the Chair position becomes vacant, the by-laws require that the Vice-Chair automatically become the Chair for the rest of the term. Charles Flynt, as the new Chair opened the selection for the Vice Chair. He recommended that the vice chair be a resident. It's not a requirement but a recommendation. Kim Blessinger, Jennifer Post, and Dominic Howarth all volunteered. Dominic seconded for Kim. Kim seconded for Jen, and Jen seconded for Dominic. The advisory committee voted, and Kim Blessinger was voted in as the vice-chair in a vote of 3 to 2. Kenneth had not yet arrived; a quorum was present.

#### III. Introductions

The Advisory Committee completed introductions.

#### IV. Citizens Input

David Lee, a resident expressed his thoughts on the proposed budget, where he generally finds the budget decent but raised concerns about the land acquisition item. He emphasized the need for close citizen and board member involvement in such initiatives. David praised several aspects of the budget, particularly:

- Item 4: Allocation for strengthening single-family homes, which aligns with a key goal in the CRA plan. He commended Habitat for their efficiency in developing housing in the area.
- Item 7: Investment in murals, suggesting it be expanded for greater citizen engagement.
- Item 10: Clearing the lake near the park, but he urged a maintenance plan to keep it in good condition after initial clearing.



He also requested consideration for painting the bridges in Neri Park and he supported the addition of a gazebo as proposed by the Lealman District Services.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Jennifer Post moved to approve the 5-22-2024 Lealman CRA Advisory Committee Meeting minutes. Jeremy Heath seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.

## **V. Lealman CRA Agenda Items**

- **CRA Workplan Review for FY 2025**

### **Residential Improvement Grant Programs:**

Amy explained the team is considering changes to the residential grant program without adjusting the overall funding. The proposed changes include introducing a matching requirement, refining the program by also looking at what improvements are included in the grant programs for discussion at the September meeting. The grant covers facade improvements such as driveways, painting, landscaping, and porches.

Among committee members, there was a brief discussion if painting should be a covered improvement, or if it should be paired with another improvement.

### **Home Improvement Program (Habitat for Humanity):**

The contract between Pinellas County and Habitat for Humanity for the home improvement program is being proposed for changes due to rising costs, particularly in property values and construction. The reimbursement for property purchases is being proposed to increase from \$25,000 to \$40,000, and hard construction costs from \$15,000 to \$20,000, raising the total maximum reimbursement per property from \$55,000 to \$60,000. Additionally, adding a option to extend the three-year contract, which is about to enter its third year, by adding an optional two-year extension will allow the contract for a total of 5-years. If the extension is triggered, the total contract value increases from \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million. The \$500,000 annual limit has been removed to allow more flexibility in property purchasing, and the contract is now recognized as a \$1.5 million program over three years, with the potential increase to \$2.5 million over five years. These changes will allow the program to be more efficient and responsive to current property market conditions.

### **Sidewalks:**

The sidewalk program allocates \$200,000 annually to address gaps in the sidewalk network rather than implementing a comprehensive master plan. This year, a new sidewalk was



completed along the 39<sup>th</sup> Street between the elementary school and Lealman Park, enhancing connectivity between the school and the park. The program focuses on small-scale projects that fill gaps in the existing sidewalk network, such as connecting schools, neighborhoods, and parks.

#### **Land Purchase:**

The land Purchase was an existing work plan item. It was previously set at \$300,000, but we proposed increasing it to \$500,000 to better accommodate potential opportunities, as \$300,000 may not be sufficient for current property prices. This budget allows for opportunistic land purchases as they arise, although no specific properties are currently targeted. To spend CRA funding, the project or initiative needs to be identified in the annual work plan and be included in the adopted budget. For property purchases exceeding \$250,000, Board of County Commission approval would be required.

#### **Public Art:**

Simply a change in wording, revised to broaden its scope from only murals to also include any public art installation.

#### **Lealman Exchange Strategic Plan Implementation**

The Lealman Exchange strategic plan implementation budget is being adjusted to align with the agreement with the St. Pete Foundation. In the third year of the agreement, the CRA's contribution to running the facility will decrease from \$200,000 to \$175,000.

#### **Gateway and Placemaking**

The gateway and placemaking signs project, completed in March, has led to a proposed budget reduction from \$25,000 to \$10,000. A \$10,000 annual agreement with the sign company covers these replacements and any future needs.

#### **Lealman Park Enhancement Project**

The Lealman Park project will be in its second phase, which includes two components: enhancing the park's lighting and clearing vegetation along the public right-of-way adjacent to the pond. This item reflects this through the reduction of this project from \$200k to \$100k to carry over funds for the pond project being completed in FY25. This part of the project also requires additional research and survey work, delaying its completion until the next fiscal year.



The lighting portion of the park enhancement project will improve safety and visibility in the park. The lighting fixtures are on order and expected to arrive in mid-July. Installation will take about four weeks, and the project will be completed by mid-August.

### **Special Events**

The promotional special events program is deleted due to state statute changes and this workplan item of \$25,000.00 was removed.

### **Lealman Exchange Technology Upgrades**

Proposed no changes to the Lealman exchange technology initiative and keep in the workplan and budget to upgrade the technology in the building for \$25,000.

### **Joe's Creek Master Plan**

The Joe's Creek master plan will be starting soon, the workplan shows additional funding in FY25 implementation of the plan for \$50,000.

### **Monument Sign**

\$100,000.00 is proposed for a monument sign for the Lealman Exchange, which would include electronic messaging to better announce the building's presence.

### **Neri Park/46<sup>th</sup> Avenue Playground Upgrade**

Proposed project to add shade cover, benches, and some additional fencing for safety from the main road. This is a \$30,000 workplan/budget item. After some discussion with the committee about additional landscaping efforts that could be completed on-site, the committee agreed that they would like to increase the project to \$40,000.

### **Demolition Fund**

Including a demolition workplan item and funding was proposed. The need for demolition funding was discussed. The potential costs and processes for demolishing properties, including asbestos abatement, were considered. CDBG funds from Housing and Community Development have been used towards demolition costs, but it was recommended by Amy Davis to also have a demolition item and funding available to the CRA in case CDBG funding is not available. The workplan initially proposed \$50,000 for this item, after further discussion, the proposed budget was adjusted to \$25,000. A question by a committee member asked if the funds used for demolition would become a lien against the property, staff would have to



follow up on that.

In discussion wrapping up the proposed workplan, a committee member asked about contributing to the YMCA swim program, and Amy Davis explained that is was not allowable use of CRA funds.

### **Gazebo and Community Identity**

A request by the Lealman Community Development Services was received for a Gazebo in Lealman Park. Amy Davis raised concerns about its potential to attract unwanted activity in the park and suggested alternatives for the committee to explore such as a trellis or a large sculpture to foster community identity without creating a space that might encourage undesirable behavior. Discussion amongst committee members emphasized the importance of establishing a focal point for events and gatherings while ensuring it aligns with Lealman's unique characteristics. Other alternatives were discussed, including putting something in the future Neri Park, perhaps an amphitheater or a bandshell instead of a gazebo. There was debate about the pros and cons on both sides. The CRA advisory committee is interested in exploring the gazebo or another structure and whether it will be in Lealman Park or Ray Neri Park. Further discussion and research will be required.

### **The Committee held a vote to approve the following:**

**Agree to spend the next year researching what options for community building/structure to consider for next year's CRA workplan/budget, deciding not to add it to this year's budget.**

**Approve this year's budget, with the two changes to increase the 46th Avenue playground budget item from 30K to 40K and drop the demolition budget item from 50K to 25K.**

*Jeremy Heath brought up that he didn't see that land acquisition was in the current workplan that the advisory board voted on last year. He also stated that they were not able to vote on the budget last year. Amy asked how they felt about it being added this year. Jeremy said he was good with it, but he was hoping that with some of the land acquisition issues from last year, the committee could get a good answer as to why it wasn't included. Charles Flynt and Jennifer Post also did not remember it being there. Kim Blessinger clarified, so if it wasn't there last year, now it's being added. Charles Flynt likes the idea of being added now to give flexibility, and Jeremy and Jennifer agreed that they are on board with it being added now.*

*The committee would like to ensure that in the future, if a purchase is made, it is advised in advance, discussed, and ensured that it will be a public benefit. They would also like to have time to review and approve it before any purchase is made.*



*Amy Davis committed to communicating with the committee to accommodate the timeliness needed to make these transactions.*

**Jeremy Heath Motioned to approve, and Jennifer Post seconded. The motion carried and was approved unanimously.**

(A Side note: Jeremy Heath wants answers to why the 300K for property acquisition was not on last year's work plan; that was his one side note on giving his approval for the budget.)

- **Additional CRA Updates by Amy Davis**

**LEX Master Lease and Management Agreement:**

The LEX master lease and management agreement will be two and a half years old by the end of this fiscal year, and LEX has indicated its intent to take the first five-year extension. Active work is underway to move forward with the extension process.

**Project Updates:**

**Joe's Creek Restoration & Greenwell Greenway Trail:**

Staff is awaiting a decision on a large NOAA federal grant, expected by the end of summer, which, if secured, would bring the total project funding to nearly \$75 million (currently targeted at \$54 million). The funding agency has confirmed they are actively reviewing proposals.

**Lealman Heights RFP:**

Submissions are due on July 25, with staff members serving on the evaluation committee.

**Joe's Creek Master Plan:**

The contract is being finalized, and updates will be shared once information can be released.

**Ray Neri Park Closure:**

The park was closed on June 17, and notifications were sent to relevant parties. The closure affects the back-end bridges, and contingency planning is in place. Concerns about the illegal feeding of wildlife, particularly alligators, were raised, and any incidents could lead to the bridge's closure on the front end.

**Silver Button Trees Along 54th Avenue (Lealman Park):**

At a recent Lealman Community Association meeting, concerns were raised about the silver button trees along 54th Avenue in Lealman Park, as they are struggling due to limited sunlight and space. Staff discussed with Urban forestry and exploration of relocating the trees to more suitable areas within the park can be done. Possible locations include the neighborhood side of the park to improve the tree canopy and the open space between 46th Street and the playground. A cost



estimate will be prepared, with potential funding from the Lealman Park Improvement Budget. Some trees are currently under power lines, and the upcoming 54th Avenue expansion will move them to the north side. Relocating the trees may also restore visibility to a piece of public art currently obscured by the vegetation.

**2520 55 Avenue North Zoning Update:**

The property, currently being used partially as a towing impound lot, does not have an approved site plan, and the owner is seeking to change its zoning from residential to commercial use. Under the form-based code, the owner must submit an approved site plan within 90 days to be grandfathered in; failure to do so will prevent the current use. The 90-day period is halfway through, and the property owner has been informed of the required steps.

**Swimming Program & Independence Day Celebration:**

The swimming program will begin on July 15, with notifications sent out to the community. The Independence Day celebration is scheduled for July 5, the day after the Fourth of July.

Amy asked if the committee agreed to skip the July and August meetings since the June meeting had replaced the customarily scheduled July meeting. The committee agreed and voted on it. Jennifer Post motioned to have the next meeting in September, and Kim Blessinger seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. (Jeremy Heath left before this vote and did not get to vote; there was still a quorum).

**VI. Advisory Committee Member Comments**

Jennifer Post asked the attorney clarification questions regarding outside conversations as an advisory member. She had been emailed questions by a resident with their comments about the budget. The attorney stated she is allowed to talk to residents. The committee can't talk to each other outside of the committee meetings. She also discussed homeowners insurance, rising costs, and how it affects homeowners' affordability.

**VII. Adjourn**

Charles Flynt motioned to adjourn, and Dominic Howarth Seconded the motion. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 7:49 PM.