

**CITY OF NORWALK  
REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY  
REGULAR MEETING  
JUNE 14, 2016**

**ATTENDANCE:** Felix R. Serrano, Chairman; Commissioners Lisa Cooper, LaTanya Langley and Tom Devine

**AGENCY COUNSEL:** Marc Grenier, Esq.

**STAFF:** Timothy T. Sheehan, Executive Director; John Slovak, Comptroller, Susan Sweitzer, Senior Project Manager, Tami Strauss, Director of Community Development Planning

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Serrano called the meeting to order at 5:35 P.M.

**ROLL CALL**

Chairman Serrano noted that a quorum was present.

**I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- A. May 10, 2016 Regular Meeting
- B. May 26, 2016 Special Meeting

**\*\* MR. DEVINE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MAY 10, 2016 REGULAR MEETING OF THE NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY.**

**\*\* MR. SERRANO SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED. (Ms. Cooper abstained.)**

**\*\* MS. COOPER MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MAY 26, 2016 SPECIAL MEETING OF THE NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY.**

**\*\* MR. DEVINE SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**II. FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION**

- A. Approve NRA Statement of Revenues and Expenditures for year to date April 30, 2016.

Mr. Slovak reported on the financial statement as follows:

- Operating Fund 100 had actual revenues of \$1,274,668 versus budgeted revenues of \$1,305,280 for a \$30,612 revenue deficit. There was enough funding so they didn't need to take down the NRA grant for City Projects. Anything that is unused and unspent at the end of the fiscal year will go back into deferred revenue for use in another year.
- Actual operating expenditures are \$1,217,818 versus a budget of \$1,306,930 resulting in a \$89,111 favorable expenditure variance.
- There is an actual operating surplus of \$56,850 versus a budgeted operating deficit of \$1,650 resulting in a favorable net operating variance of \$58,500.

- \*\* MS. COOPER MOVED TO APPROVE THE FINANCE REPORT AS PRESENTED.**
- \*\* MR. DEVINE SECONDED.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**B. Approve proposed FY 2017 Operating Budget**

Mr. Slovak said the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency Operating Budget for FY6/30/17 was presented at the May Agency meeting for the Commissioners' review, and at this time Agency staff requests approval of the NRA Operating Budget for FY 6/30/17.

- \*\* MS. COOPER MOVED TO APPROVE THE NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY OPERATING BUDGET FOR FY 6/30/2017.**
- \*\* MR. DEVINE SECONDED.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**C. Approve Agency Counsel Rate Schedule for FY2017**

Mr. Sheehan said it has been a protracted period of time since there was an adjustment to Agency Counsel's hourly rate. The intended rate schedule is shown in the memo sent to the Commissioners, and is in line with two other quasi-public entities they looked at. Subsequent to the approval of this rate schedule there will be a formalized contract. Chairman Serrano noted that this is part of the ongoing process to review contracts to make sure they are up to date.

- \*\* MR. DEVINE MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENCY COUNSEL RATE SCHEDULE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017.**
- \*\* MS. COOPER SECONDED.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**III. BUSINESS**

**A. WALL STREET REDEVELOPMENT PLAN AREA**

1. Approve contract between Norwalk Redevelopment Agency and High Impact Financial Analysis, LLC related to underwriting the Agency's anticipated \$1,666,000 loan to the Wall Street Theater Company, Inc.

Ms. Strauss said HUD approved a \$1,666,000 loan guarantee assistance to the Wall Street Theater Company and stipulated that the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency be the Section 108 borrower of the funds, which the Commissioners had approved in September 2014. Upon receipt of the funds, the Agency will underwrite a 20-year leasehold mortgage with the Wall Street Theater Company, the operator of the theater, in the amount of \$1,666,000. The other sources of funds for the project are listed in the memo.

The Agency reached out to several third party underwriters to undertake this project. The Housing Development Fund recommended a firm in Albany, New York called High Impact Analysis whose primary line of business is underwriting loans for community development lenders. Every project they evaluate involves a subsidy component, including historic tax credits like the ones being used for the Wall Street Theater project, other tax credits and local and state and federal sources, so they are very well positioned to perform this comprehensive credit analysis of the proposed Wall Street Theater loan. Their proposed fixed fee is \$4,500,

plus expenses, and they will provide their recommendations to the Agency in memo form, and would attend a Commission meeting if required.

Mr. Sheehan explained that the Section 108 loan is between the Redevelopment Agency and the City and HUD, so that the Agency would be the borrower of the Section 108 funds. The Agency would reloan the funds to the Wall Street Theater, who would be responsible to make loan payments to the Agency and the Agency would be responsible for the repayment of the loan to HUD so that the City's entitlement is not negatively impacted if there is a default. The maximum exposure is approximately \$90,000 on an annual basis, and the Agency will have a first position lien on the property.

Chairman Serrano said the underwriting process is very important because the underwriter will look at everything to show that the Wall Street Theater can service this debt, and they will let them know if there is an issue. He noted that the loan is the take-out of the construction loan and would not be drawn until construction is complete and there is a CO for the building.

Attorney Grenier said after the underwriting comes in, the Commissioners will then approve a term sheet laying out the conditions under which the Agency is lending the money, and then a commitment letter will be issued to the borrower on behalf of the Commissioners as to those terms and conditions, but they need to do their due diligence as to whether or not the Wall Street Theater is qualified and the Agency wants to lend them money.

Mr. Sheehan said the issue now is does the loan actually underwrite, and the first step would be for the Agency to hear from the underwriter, and he thinks they should actually have the underwriter in attendance so that they can present the information to the Commission and answer any questions, and then should the Commission determine that they want to accept the recommendation, they can formulate all of the issues in the term sheet. Again, it is up to the Commissioners to make the determination as to whether they want to move forward, and once they are comfortable with whatever the structure of the loan is, the Agency would clear that with HUD and make sure HUD is comfortable with it.

Ms. Strauss said there is a specified time frame in which they have to turn the money around, so they won't draw it down until they are sure that it is going to be lent out and the Commission approves it.

**\*\* MR. DEVINE MOVED TO APPROVE THE CHAIRMAN TO EXECUTE A CONTRACT BETWEEN NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY AND HIGH IMPACT FINANCIAL ANALYSIS, LLC FOR A FEE OF \$4,500 PLUS EXPENSES, IF ANY.**

**\*\* MS. COOPER SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

*Ms. Langley joined the meeting at 5:55 P.M.*

## **2. Review the process for advancing the Master Plan for Freese Park**

Ms. Strauss said the Common Council awarded the Agency \$221,000 of planning administration for the planning associated with the CDBG grant for next year. In that \$221,000 the Common

Council required that the funds include the cost associated with the development of a Master Plan for Wall Street's Freese Park, Klondike Park and nearby esplanades, and on June 30<sup>th</sup> the Agency will release a request for proposals for the development of a Master Plan, for which they have budgeted \$25,000. They will invite proposal submissions from qualified landscape design firms with demonstrated park programming and landscape architectural experience to develop a concept design, design development and final design, and the specifications for the implementation of the Master Plan. The RFP will be developed in conjunction with the City Recreation and Parks Department and will be provided to the Recreation and Parks Committee of the Common Council for their review in July 2016. Final selection of a consultant will be determined by the Redevelopment Agency Commission at the September 2016 meeting.

## **B. WAYFINDING**

1. Approve contract with Merje in the amount of \$48,900 to advance implementation of the wayfinding program

Ms. Sweitzer said the Agency engaged a consultant in the wayfinding industry to help them identify the general needs of Norwalk as a community and to help them draft a request for proposals to seek services in designing a system. The consultant identified a number of firms with known competencies in wayfinding for cities of comparable size to Norwalk. Five firms responded and were interviewed, and they negotiated a preliminary wayfinding assessment contract with Merje, the firm selected, which is located in the Philadelphia area and has done a lot of work in New Haven and other communities in Connecticut of similar size. They are undertaking the wayfinding project for Norwalk's urban core, which would be the Wall Street District, the SoNo District and the district in the middle. Merje drafted a wayfinding assessment which identifies community needs, including a hierarchy of signage and an information plan within that hierarchy. They also addressed issues of technology, program management and maintenance of such a system. Merje reviewed this information with community stakeholders and interested community members.

The contract which is before the Commission is for Phase 1 of the plan. This would include tiers of signage, messaging, as well as signage at the railroad station and other places of public transit. They will develop a complete set of location recommendations and construction documents for the City to bid out. They are also looking at an application for static kiosks, and they will produce a finished orientation map design which will be available electronically so they can adapt it as destinations change. They are also looking at a specific assignment of management and maintenance, which is critical to putting in any such system. The work product in Phase I will come back to the Commission for review, and then to the Common Council.

The three districts are identified primarily in a system of colors, which could be expanded through other areas. Three design options were presented to stakeholders and were posted on line for about six weeks, and some comments were received. Ultimately the Common Council will decide on the design of the sign, but the concept and the direction of the proposed signage came out of the process and the public review that they have done.

Mr. Sheehan said to summarize, the consultant has taken them to a concept level in terms of the design of the wayfinding system and a hierarchy of signage that is meant to accomplish different messages. The contract is now taking them into the implementation phase of the program, and the consultant will begin to lay out how the whole plan is going to be

implemented in terms of this first phase and who is going on the signage and where the signs would actually be located. Ultimately all of this will come back to the Commission and then up to the Common Council for its approval.

Chairman Serrano asked if the City eventually decides it wants to take on the wayfinding signage as well, will it be consistent throughout for visitors, because otherwise it will be confusing. Mr. Sheehan said he doesn't necessarily have a problem if the signage isn't consistent throughout the entire City as long as it is consistent in the highly trafficked areas of the City. The Agency's responsibility is basically bringing wayfinding into the urban core, and getting that accomplished would be a major accomplishment on the part of the City. The funding will come out of the capital budget. It is not an inexpensive proposition to implement, which is why they determined to go in phases, and they probably would be looking at three or more capital budget cycles. They anticipate the signs would be going in approximately a year from now. Obviously the mall is going to be a major traffic generator so there would certainly be room for the mall to be incorporated on the signs, and the mall will make its own signs as well. Ms. Sweitzer noted that the developer team for the mall has been actively involved in the process as the whole wayfinding system is very important to them. The panels on the signs, particularly the vehicular signage, can all be taken out and added to so they are not stuck with something that is no longer there.

- \*\* MS. COOPER MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY CHAIRMAN, FELIX SERRANO, TO EXECUTE THE CONTRACT WITH MERJE FOR DESIGN SERVICES FOR PHASE I OF THE NORWALK WAY-FINDING SYSTEM INSTALLATION IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$48,900.**
- \*\* MS. LANGLEY SECONDED.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**IV. NEW BUSINESS**

None.

**V. OLD BUSINESS**

None.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further Old or New Business, upon motion of Mr. Devine, seconded by Ms. Langley, the meeting was adjourned at 6:17 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Pacchiana