



Washington Heights Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
6:00 pm Wednesday July 13, 2022
Kool Family Community Center/Valentine Room
200 W. Michigan Avenue, Battle Creek, Michigan

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Lynn Ward Gray, CCLBA Board Liaison
Jenasia Morris, Ward 2 City Commissioner
Rochelle Hatcher, District 2 County Commissioner
Ron Sweet, Vice Chair, NPC2
Dr. Elishae Johnson, Chair, CCG
Marcelle Heath, Section 1
Brigetta Phillips-Freeman, Section 2
Shirley McKinney, Section 3

Shanay Settles, Section 4
Aric Vaughn, Section 5
Dennis McKinley, At-Large
Arniece Montgomery, At-Large
Hannah Frentz, At-Large
Damon Brown, At-Large
Centhia Fleming, Alternate
Sherrill Cotton, Alternate

1. Call to Order Roll Call

Chair Lynn Ward Gray called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

Roll Call: Ron Sweet, Marcelle Heath, Brigetta Phillips-Freeman, Shirley McKinney, Shanay Settles, Aric Vaughn, Dennis McKinley, Arniece Montgomery, Hannah Frentz, Damon Brown, Sherrill Cotton (Alternate), and Lynn Ward Gray were present. Dr. Elishae Johnson arrived 6:06 pm and Centhia Fleming (Alternate) arrived 6:10 pm. Jenasia Morris was excused. Rochelle Hatcher was absent.

Staff: Krista Trout-Edwards, Executive Director, Amy Rose Robinson, Property and Project Coordinator, and Janie Brown, Grant Support Technician.

2. Approval of Agenda

Shanay Settles moved to approve the agenda as presented. Hannah Frentz seconded. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote (12 - 0).

3. Citizen Comment

None.

Vice Chair Ron Sweet asked that we go back to the Approval of Agenda item. He wanted to know if we could have a roll call vote of the Approval of the Agenda so that we could document every regular committee member vote. After discussion and explanation of the process from Lynn Ward Gray, she said that Mr. Sweet needed to make a motion.

Ron Sweet made the motion for the Approval of the Agenda to be by roll call vote. No one seconded. The motion failed.

4. Consent Agenda

a. Approval of the Minutes – May 11, 2022

b. Approval of the Notes – June 8, 2022

Shanay Settles made motion to approve the consent agenda. Aric Vaughn seconded. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote (12 - 0).

5. CCLBA Report

Krista Trout-Edwards presented the CCLBA report and commented that at the June meeting there was not a quorum and therefore, the committee met as a Committee of the Whole where members discussed the case studies that will be readdressed later in the meeting.

Damon Brown requested confirmation that there was a prior meeting to discuss the case studies.

Krista Trout Edwards confirmed that the last meeting was on June 6th; however, there was not a quorum and we are readdressing items in this meeting.

Krista Trout Edwards continued with the CCLBA Report:

- a. CCLBA Mission and Vision – as presented
- b. Youth Member Representative – as presented
- c. City of Battle Creek Items
 - i. Recap of Citywide Rezone – as presented
 - ii. Sidewalk from Dudley Elementary School to Parkway Avenue

She noted that staff reached out the city of Battle Creek and the Battle Creek Community Foundation about this project and found out that \$34,000 has been raised of the \$92,933 needed for this project; that is the new post-Covid estimate for the sidewalk per the city. She stressed that volunteers from the Advisory Committee were needed to work as a subcommittee on this project to follow through with Mr. Sweet, as the Land Bank staff is only able to provide minimal support as this falls outside of our project scope.

- d. Informational | Upcoming Items:
 - i. Community Walking Tour – as presented
 - ii. Side Lot Applications – as presented
 - iii. Governing Documents – as presented

Arneice Montgomery asked about the June meeting with no quorum and about any actions that were taken.

Krista Trout Edwards explained that the committee could not take any actions (make motions and vote) because the Advisory Committee did not have quorum. She stated that she contacted our legal counsel, and he informed her that we could continue with our meeting as a “Committee of the Whole” and bring back the recommendations to the whole committee at the next meeting. She stated that there is a learning curve for us all.

Dennis McKinley asked if the Walking Tour is just for the WHNAC or for the community.

Krista Trout Edwards responded that it is open to the public. This will be an opportunity for visioning of the future of WHN.

6. Discussion Items

a. Case Study #1- Hexx Designs | Van Buren St W

Amy Rose Robinson presented staff report.

Arneice Montgomery asked if she understood Ms. Robinson to say that Hexx wants to purchase and build and then rent to other businesses.

Amy Rose Robinson explained their long-term goal is to expand their business, add a building and potentially rent to others.

Lynn Ward Gray requested that Advisory Committee members hold their questions and allow Hexxon Villa to share more about how they plan to utilize this space.

Hexxon Villa, one of the co-owners of Hexx Designs, shared they are in Phase 1 of changes to their existing building and partnered with the city of Battle Creek to clear/clean up the lot behind their building. They want to extend the clearing of the two requested lots. He said they want to bring technology to the area and help attract new business owners. He stated they want to be a partner in the community to help the area. He shared that the Adventist Village does not want to sell their lot as they plan to build upon it. He also mentioned that the former Family Dollar property owners are planning to open as Washington Heights Fresh Market, which is not named appropriately as the plan is for a liquor store and not a fresh market; he said that they brought this to the attention of the Liquor Commission.

Hannah Frentz asked him to share more about the environment and their process, especially since it is in the neighborhood.

Hexxon Villa spoke to their environmentally safe process the business uses and stated that there will be no environmental impact to the neighbors.

Ron Sweet was recognized to speak but offered to let Damon Brown speak first.

Damon Brown had questions centered around understanding the whole Land Bank process and asked how we got to this point during the freeze and not all being equally allowed to submit requests for properties during this "pause". He requested an understanding for the community and having equity with regards to all being able to apply for properties during the freeze. He said that as a member of this committee, and speaking up for the community, that we need to address equity and inclusion. He also asked when Hexx Designs' application was received, and if it was during the freeze.

Amy Rose Robinson responded that yes, it was received during the pause.

Krista Trout-Edwards responded this approach made sense to the CCLBA staff as it cannot bring everything at once but addressing a smaller contingent of sites as they make sense. Not all requests that come in for Side Lots, like these were originally applied for, are sellable as Side Lots. These two cannot be sold as Side Lots because they are zoned commercial, and the interested buyer is a commercial business; this would be a direct sale.

Damon Brown thanked staff for the clarity. He continued to express that the community/residents need to know when they can apply for properties and stated that they are not applying during the freeze or pause. He said that the Land Bank is presenting Case Studies and moving forward addressing some specific cases where the requests for property were received during the pause and that it feels a little political and does not feel inclusive.

Dr. Elishae Johnson stated for clarification that we may need to go back in the process to ensure all have equal opportunity to request and that we need clear communication that is equitable to everybody. She said that taking a step back to review the process and make sure everyone is aware and can equally submit their requests would be beneficial.

Arneice Montgomery addressed how can other residents or businesses partner with CCLBA during the freeze the same as Hexx Designs, Sunlight Gardens, and WHUMC did. How can others be afforded the same opportunity to request and have their case studies presented during the pause.

Krista Trout Edwards stated this is getting out of context. She restated the approach that staff took made sense (to staff) as it is aligned with Land Bank programs and work efforts. She stated that staff has continued with its work efforts throughout the county so keeping some of this work moving forward just made sense.

Damon Brown again asked when and what can we share with the residents so that they can begin to apply and if it is equitable to all. He also asked if it will be open to all.

Krista responded that the CCLBA work continues beyond this project and that overlap is where the confusion is. The CCLBA staff have discussed and are using Statement of Interest Forms for inquiries to track interest. They are discussing needed changes to the process and the timelines to make it open to all for submissions during the pause

on sales. We are working on it and are doing the best we can. We are trying to figure it out without holding on to all properties until all can be addressed.

Damon Brown again expressed the confusion and frustration that has arisen due to the pause and some being allowed to apply, and their project being presented, while others are following the guidance given and not applying or requesting properties.

Krista Trout-Edwards reiterated that staff has continued to accept *Statements of Interests* as is typical and that our office has received continuous calls so this made sense. Ms. Robinson and Ms. Brown are working through changes to our internal process.

Damon Brown stated that at 44 years of age, having been born and raised in the Washington Heights Neighborhood, he has seen a lot of the property and commercial property bought up by outside interested folks, especially on VanBuren and Michigan Avenue. He expressed frustration that it is now being requested by some while some are being told they cannot apply at this time and concluded that it didn't feel fair.

Arneice Montgomery expressed that Mr. Brown said most of her comment, but she wanted to add that this is a hard process and that CCLBA has taken on this extra level by creating the advisory committee. She wants to ensure that people understand the historical perspective and that there are no black businesses in this area anymore. She said that the Committee needs to make sure that there are opportunities for black businesses in the future. Specifically, she wanted to know how petitioners can partner with the Land Bank during the freeze so that a Case Study could be presented so that others can be prepared for future presentations.

Ron Sweet stated that he was concerned with the issues being expressed and it goes deeper than these issues. He stated there is a big lack of communication. He spoke of concern for the properties and surrounding streets and hoping that those requesting understand what they are requesting and what is surrounding them.

Dr. Elishae Johnson stated it sounds like we need to go back to the process to ensure that we all are on the same page, and then look at projects.

Damon Brown said that the Land Bank needs to let the community know when they can apply.

Lynn Ward Gray stated that the Land Bank is working on their process and will bring it back.

Dr. Elishae Johnson stated we need to consider stepping back, not to require these folks to come back and present again. We need the fresh start but want to avoid the head start.

Hannah Frenz asked about Grant Funds and does CCLBA manage and ensure we do not overextend ourselves.

Krista Trout-Edwards responded with examples of how the AC would approach recommendations for the funds within the WHN. There is significant funding out there and we will need to address options for spending. She said that she understood what members were saying, but that she felt staff might be closer to what the Committee wanted than it seemed at that moment. She noted that they do have items on this agenda for trying to move some of the properties forward because staff cannot come forward with all the properties at once. From a management perspective, she noted that staff must work in smaller chunks. She reiterated that staff is getting the process worked out and has taken note of this misstep.

Hexxon Villa shared his background story regarding the reason for creating this business in this area, his dislike of the gun violence, and his desire to show kids that you can make it out and make life better.

Shanay Settles asked if the freeze is off and if multiple people wanted the same property, how would staff determine who will get the property, beyond first come first served.

Krista Trout-Edwards shared sometimes highest offer, sometimes plans for owner occupancy, or direct sale by fair market value. She stated that decisions are based on what is determined best for the property or area, but not

always based on the highest offer. She stated the Board of Directors has given them the ability to make decisions based on stabilizing the neighborhood.

Dr. Elishae Johnson again stated that we need to step back and ensure all are communicated the same information and have the same opportunities.

Hannah Frentz stated that any small business owner will push forward and pursue during a freeze. She said that in a community that is what you do as a small business owner. She asked if there have been any other inquiries for this property.

Damon Brown appreciated Hannah's comment, and said he understands the hustle mentality. But understanding the system and following what has been laid out as the process, but the concern is that these two sites were not available to all who were interested.

Krista Trout-Edwards clarified that the freeze on sales is not off at this time, we were just trying to move certain groups of property for consideration to acclimate the Committee to the types of scenarios and the decisions that will come forward.

Hexxon Villa also noted the other property they purchased was not up for sale, but they reached out to the owner, told them of their plan and those owners agreed to sell the property. He continued that coming to the Land Bank for the two lots was not random but a part of their bigger plan.

Lynn Ward Gray suggested that the Committee proceed with the remaining two presentations as the interested parties are here. WHNAC agreed to going forward to hear the other two case studies.

b. Case Study #2 - Sunlight Gardens | Kendall St N

Amy Rose Robinson presented the Case Study.

Damon Brown asked for clarification if this case study is for two lots.

Amy Rose Robinson clarified that this case study is only for the corner lot on Kendall Street N and Parkway Drive.

Devon Wilson shared the business expansion plans to increase access to local food through growing local produce and making it available to the community. He said that they also want to educate and train new partners and create new farming businesses for those who are interested. He said that a direct goal is to build more black farmers, that he has been doing this for six years, and that his organization bought the land in the summer of 2020. He said that when they purchased the adjacent land, they thought they also owned the corner lot. He indicated they were interested in the Oneita area properties to increase food security. He said it is a great benefit to have clean, nutritious, vitamin filled produce in our community, especially for our kids in schools. He stated he is working on awareness of the impact of food to our daily lives. He said the Oneita property is challenged with dumping as well as being a 5-star resort area for animals. He said that they will speak more about that at their next presentation. He also commented on the need to have black businesses and being supportive by meeting and addressing the issues.

Marcelle Heath asked if this is a frozen property as well.

Amy Rose Robinson responded yes.

Marcelle Heath also asked if there would be a need to check in with the neighbors of the Oneita Street properties.

Devon Wilson expressed that he does discuss plans with the neighbors.

Amy Rose Robinson responded about the Oneita properties being in the long-term goals.

Damon Brown began to share his appreciation for Sunlight Gardens and the work he does with them through his organization, RISE.

Lynn Ward Gray indicated that the work between the two organizations would be a conflict of interest, and that Mr. Brown would need to abstain from commenting or voting on this matter.

Arneice Montgomery asked if this property is commercial.

Amy Rose Robinson said that it was zoned residential.

Arneice Montgomery then asked how that would work with a garden.

Devon Wilson spoke to the special use permit process with the city, but acknowledged it was accomplished when Sprout owned this area.

Shanay Settles asked if the corner lot would be used for signage and announcements rather than for farming and gardening.

Hannah Frentz asked if the space would be used for wedding and other events and if there is parking.

Devon Wilson further explained plans that will include growing in that area and that some parking is available on the property as well as the surrounding streets.

Damon Brown left the meeting at 7:35 pm.

c. Case Study #3 - Washington Heights United Methodist Church | Greenwood Avenue & Moffit Place

Lynn Ward Gray and Krista Trout Edwards confirmed the members that cannot participate nor vote in this Case Study due to conflict of interest as they are members of the Hub of Hope Board. There are six members: Dennis McKinley, Shanay Settles, Shirley McKinley, Damon Brown, Dr. Elishae Johnson, and Jenasia Morris, who was already excused.

The remaining members, with the activation of the Alternates met the quorum, for a total of nine. Alternate members activated were: Centhia Fleming and Sherill Cotton

Hannah Frentz made motion to activate the Alternate Members for the discussion, motion, and voting for Washington Heights United Methodist Church | Greenwood Avenue & Moffit Place #3 – WHUMC. Shanay Settles seconded. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

Krista Trout-Edwards presented the charts as provided. She also noted the MOU outlines the roles, expectations of the Land Bank and WHUMC, and what type of technical and financial assistance we will be able to provide. She also noted that we all need to be aware of the applicant's other funding and the deadlines associated with it. She stated that the Advisory Committee needs to decide if this approach makes sense.

Pastor Monique French added that they have purchased the City of Battle Creek properties, and that the plan is to start small and expand after success in this area.

Aric Vaughn asked how many homes will be in this area.

Pastor French responded that based on discussion with her designers, it could be up to 15 houses. She said that they may be able to increase to 20 houses if they are able to add Moffit Place Court or Greenwood Place Court in the middle.

Arneice Montgomery asked what the difference between the agreements for Hexx Designs and Sunlight Gardens is and MOU with WHUMC.

Krista Trout-Edwards noted the difference is for WHUMC, their request for property was for development. The other two were requests to purchase the properties to add to their existing property value for future use. This will be more of a partnership and the organizations can work together.

Pastor French noted the environmental testing has been completed on the parcels purchased from City of Battle Creek. She said they are working with a contractor who is putting together a plan. Additionally, they are working with a local general contractor, and that their plan is to bring opportunities back locally.

Lynn Ward Gray asked for clarification on starting on the properties.

Pastor French noted that nothing has not been started or decided yet because they need to work within the partnerships, and they are waiting to purchase Land Bank properties.

Hannah Frenz commented if there are 15 houses would it be really tight and wondered if it would it be possible to build fewer homes so there is space and yard with each.

Pastor French responded with description of housing plans, that includes two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a loft area.

Hannah Frenz also asked if the area was in a historic district.

Amy Rose Robinson indicated that it was not.

Lynn Ward Gray noted it is 8:00 pm and moving on to New Business.

7. New Business

7a. Discuss and recommend to the CCLBA Board that properties eligible for sale under the *Transform This Home* program be listed for sale with Troxel Realty.

Amy Rose Robinson presented the staff report.

Shanay Settles asked what types of exterior changes would be required in the historic district.

Amy Rose Robinson responded anything on the exterior has to be approved by in accordance to the Secretary of Interior standards, like siding, windows, and doors.

Hannah Frenz asked what the role of the committee is once the properties go to Troxel for sale.

Amy Rose Robinson responded that the role of the Advisory Committee is to determine if the approach makes sense for the neighborhood, and once they go to Troxel they are on the market for sale like any other property. She noted that staff prefers to sell to owner occupied buyers.

Shanay Settles asked if the cost of the repair for the foundation would be passed on to the buyer.

Amy Rose Robinson responded that the buyer would need to show that they have the capacity to do the work. She further clarified that the cost to the buyer would be based on the comparative market analysis which does not necessarily include the cost expended. Sometimes we take a loss and do not get our investment back.

Centhia Fleming asked how do you price for the buyer when the Land Bank invested \$50K and it will take \$50k for the buyer to make it livable.

Amy Rose Robinson responded again it will be based on the comparative market analysis. The price may be reduced according to the work that needs to be done on the home.

Marcelle Heath moved to approve and Hannah Frentz seconded the motion as presented.

Roll Call Vote: Ron Sweet -yes; Dr. Elishae Johnson-yes; Marcelle Heath-yes; Brigetta Phillips Freeman-yes; Shirley McKinney-yes; Shanay Settles-yes; Aric Vaughn-yes; Dennis McKinley-yes; Arneice Montgomery-yes; Hannah Frentz-yes; and Lynn Ward Gray-yes.

The motion carried unanimously (11 – 0) by majority roll call vote.

Dr. Elishae Johnson left at 8:10 pm.

7b. Discuss and recommend to the CCLBA Board that commercially zoned properties in Section 1 eligible for sale either as direct sales or under the *Develop This Lot* program be listed for sale with Troxel Realty.

Amy Rose Robinson presented the staff report.

Shanay Settles noted it is hard to see and understand what the properties are with parcel numbers and no addresses.

Amy Rose Robinson explained when and why the City of Battle Creek removes the addresses. She also offered to do a Zoom session with interested members who want to learn more about GIS.

Lynn Ward Gray confirmed that Ron Sweet, Hannah Frentz, and Shanay Settles would like the Zoom session on GIS.

Arneice Montgomery asked for clarity on the map, specifically river versus streets.

Amy Rose Robinson provided that explanation.

Hannah Frentz inquired about price variations.

Amy Rose Robinson explained that it is based on fair market value which takes into consideration the size.

Shanay Settles made a motion as presented and Aric Vaughn seconded.

Arneice Montgomery asked how Troxel Realty got the privilege to sell for the Land Bank.

Amy Rose Robinson share that it was done by a Request for Proposal, as required.

Hannah asked how properties listed for sale be prioritized for sales to black business owners.

Krista Trout-Edwards explained that we cannot discriminate or show preference to buyers based on Fair Housing Law.

Roll Call Vote: Ron Sweet – yes; Marcelle Heath – yes; Brigetta Phillips-Freeman – yes; Shirley McKinney – yes; Shanay Settles – yes; Aric Vaughn – yes; Dennis McKinley – yes; Arneice Montgomery – yes; Lynn Ward Gray – yes; and Hannah Frentz – no.

The motion passes (9 – 1) by majority roll call vote.

7c. Discuss and recommend to the CCLBA Board the sale of 4720-00-006-0 + 4720-00-005-0 to Hexx Design as a direct sale at Fair Market Value, with assistance on title work and site clearance costs, through Troxel Realty.

Hannah Frantz moved to proceed with approval for Hexx Designs as presented. Dennis McKinley seconded.

Shanay Settles stated that she thought this item was tabled based on discussion earlier.

Lynn Ward Gray explained that a motion has been made to vote so a vote must be taken.

Roll Call Vote as presented: Marcelle Heath – yes; Brigetta Phillips Freeman – yes; Shirley McKinley - yes; Hanna Frenz – yes; Aric Vaughn – yes; Dennis McKinley-yes; Shanay Settles – no; Ron Sweet – no; Arneice Montgomery – no; Lynn Ward Gray – no

The motion passed (6 – 4) by majority roll call vote.

7d. Discuss and recommend to the CCLBA Board the sale of 8870-00-040-0 to Sunlight Gardens as a direct sale at Fair Market Value, with assistance on title work, through Troxel Realty.

Marcelle Heath moved to proceed with approval for Sunlight Gardens as presented. Dennis McKinley seconded.

Roll Call Vote as presented: Ron Sweet – yes; Marcelle Heath – yes; Brigetta Phillips Freeman – yes; Shirley McKinley -yes; Shanay Settles – yes; Aric Vaughn – yes; Dennis McKinley-yes; Arneice Montgomery –yes; Hanna Frenz – yes; and Lynn Ward Gray – yes

The motion passed (10 - 0) by majority roll call vote.

7e. Discuss and recommend to the CCLBA Board entering a Memorandum of Understanding with WHUMC for properties identified by 3900-00-035-0, 3900-00-034-0, 3900-00-033-0, and 3900-00-024

Marcelle Heath made a motion as presented. Aric Vaughan seconded.

Krista Trout-Edwards and Lynn Ward Gray confirmed count for quorum with the next motion to which we have some regular members with a conflict of interest on the Hub of Hope Board.

Krista Trout-Edwards confirmed we have nine voting members with alternates activated at this time.

Hannah Frenz asked if it was possible to offer to Pastor French/WHUMC as a direct sale rather than the MOU process.

Krista Trout Edwards responded that it is not possible with the request going forward as Develop This Lot based on our policies.

Roll Call Vote Ron Sweet – yes; Marcelle Heath-yes; Brigetta Phillips Freeman-yes; Aric Vaughn-yes; Arneice Montgomery-yes; Hannah Frenz-yes; Centhia Fleming-yes; Sherrill Cotton-yes; and Lynn Ward Gray – yes.

The motion passed unanimously (9 – 0) by majority roll call vote.

Shirley McKinley, Dennis McKinley, and Shanay Settles abstained from the discussion and vote on this matter. Other members with a conflict of interest were no longer at the meeting.

7f. Discuss and recommend new timeline for Youth Representative Position applicants.

Marcelle Heath made a motion as presented. Aric Vaughan seconded. The motion passed by voice vote, unanimously (9 to 0).

8. Citizen Comment

None.

9. Board Member Comments & Announcements

Aric Vaughan asked if this would be the space to ask for neighborhood clean-up of the properties in Section 5 with huge dumping issues.

Krista Trout Edwards suggested we address that outside of this meeting and bring it up in the next CCLBA Report.

Hannah Frenz asked if it would be appropriate to make a motion to extend our meeting to 2 hours.

Staff confirmed our meetings are already schedule for 2 hours.

Krista Trout Edwards noted we do appreciate the committee members comments and we will use them to improve our process.

Amy Rose Robinson commented on the remaining handouts available such as the Northside News, Tax Foreclosure brochure, and the Habitat for Humanity flyer.

10. Adjournment

Aric Vaughn made the motion for adjournment, Shanay Settles seconded. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote (9 – 0). The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 pm.

Next meeting: August 10, 2022, 6:00 pm at Kool Family Community Center