



J.H. SESSIONS BUILDING TASK FORCE

SPECIAL MEETING

Wednesday, September 25, 2019, 5:00 p.m.

CITY HALL, 111 North Main St., Bristol, CT

First Floor Meeting Room

MINUTES

ATTENDEES: Thomas Hislop, Bill Mascetti, Mike Massarelli, Bob Passamano

ABSENT: Marie O'Brien

STAFF: Ellen Zoppo-Sassu, Mayor
Roger Rousseau, Purchasing
Tom DeNoto, Assessor
Tom Conlin, Asst. Corporation Counsel
Justin Malley, Bristol Development Authority
Dawn Leger, Bristol Development Authority

GUESTS: Arthur Bogen, Connecticut Brownfield Land Bank

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Zoppo-Sassu at 5 p.m.
The Task Force members and staff introduced themselves.

II. Organization and Designation of Chair

Justin Malley indicated that we would be looking at approximately 5 or more meetings. Roger Rousseau added information and said that we are not pressed for time. He explained how he sees this process progressing and that by January they should be ready at the latest. Mayor Zoppo-Sassu added that they would like to do this prior to the budget season and are interested in working on Riverside Avenue as a whole because it is a gateway and is deteriorated.

Bill Mascetti made a motion to nominate Marie O'Brien as Chair, Bob Passamano seconded the motion. All present voted in favor and the motion passed.

III. Project Background

Justin provided background on the Sessions property as well as applications for grant funds for assessment and to determine cost of cleanup. The cost of cleanup is estimated at about 1 million dollars.

We want to go out and market to developers but no one will be interested without the cleanup. Only with a developer and a real vision for the site can we pursue cleanup funds. A key piece of this is protecting the City from liability.

Arthur Bogen explained the ownership is still with a private party who is the responsible party per State regulations. The question is how to bridge from the existing condition to a developer. He explained the role of the Land Bank which is to engage in a tri-party agreement. If they could reach an agreement with a developer that the City finds acceptable for a reuse plan that the City endorses, then the obligations can be defined. The Land Bank would step in and take title and resolve the questions with the current ownership and be a co-recipient of the cleanup funding. First the agreement must be reached that the City wants this reuse, the developer is tested and the land bank and the City and the developer understand all the issues involved. They would need to have formal conversations with the regulators, with DEEP, to know that what's been proposed and the liability relief that would go along with it is something they would endorse. Then the funds can be sourced. The Land Bank is a non-profit and has been approved from the EPA to receive money to do assessment. They have just received reauthorization that they can grant money to the City to do additional assessment. When there is a plan about how it is going to be reused, they can go to the remedial action plan and get that approved and that will finalize the real cleanup costs.

He reviewed some issues of this site presently and explained the process in detail regarding how to apply and obtain cleanup funds. You have to show there is an outcome before you can clean up or apply for cleanup. You have to show that the property will be improved and generate taxes.

Tom DeNoto mentioned that there is a very large tax arrearage on the property, just under \$900,000. He said it can definitely be supported that there is repurposing of this facility.

Justin mentioned that Riverside Avenue is becoming a focus and this site can have very good potential. Justin added that the Sessions family still owns the property.

Arthur said that there are some areas where the amount of contamination has not yet been determined but we have the ability to apply for additional assessment funds.

There was a discussion about the property across the street from the Sessions building and a discussion on the property in general. Arthur advised that some data we do not have which is for the area underneath the building. The task force discussed the tours of the site which have taken place.

Roger reviewed a drawing regarding the possible parking areas and Justin spoke about TIF (tax increment financing) and tax benefits they are trying to line up. Roger asked that for the next meeting it would help to review incentive benefits.

V. FOI Considerations

Roger Rousseau said that before discussing the evaluation process we need to set up the rules of the road. This is a unique project as we do not own the property. Developers generally like to keep their information to themselves. He reviewed two types of FOI.

1) Documents: A lot of general guidelines can be shared, included how it could be financed. When the City is at the point of creating a short list, more information will be requested from the developers. Financial statements will be requested which will help the City assess their long-term viability. This is still under the guise of FOI. Once a firm is designated, more information will be requested and at this stage, future operational models will be asked for. This is when we get into proprietary information. Only at that point is the information proprietary. Everything up to that is publicly disclosable. This is because it will be connected to a City contract ultimately. However, we need to contain the information that we have as best as possible to our own internal review. This is allowable within the FOI guidelines because ultimately it will become disclosable once it becomes a formal contract.

2) Meetings: Publicly recorded meetings - minutes, postings, public meeting. Later on, they must be careful to manage certain information which may end up being a negotiating point. Roger explained the exemptions for Executive Session. Real Estate matters is one, however, these are not applicable here as the City does not own this piece of real estate. Tom Conlin added that, however, confidential financial information is exempt. They will advise when. Some information about how they will be proceeding may be exempt. Mayor Zoppo-Sassu added this extended to outside discussions. Also, certain information is available during the meetings but collected at the end of the meeting.

IV. Discuss RFQ and Proposal Evaluation Process

Some of the topics to be considered as part of the evaluation process:

- Establish consistency and what criteria area important
- Decide on key criteria (some key criteria was included in the RFQ)
- Historic impact
- Interviews
- Historic tax credits
- Timelines
- Thoroughness of presentation
- Unit Makeup: Possibility of mixed used, community rooms/communal space and availability for tax breaks
- Decide what type of model they would like to see in this building.

Considerable discussion on housing models and impact on the area. Mayor Zoppo-Sassu said that the developers know the housing market at this time and they have done studies.

Arthur Bogen said criteria should include ranking (example: 1-10), and within each should be weighting so you know the most important things. This also provides a numerical backup for what you determine as the outcome. Arthur Bogen also spoke about the liability relief from the State whereas if the developer takes certain steps they will receive certification from the State that it's clean and that it's been done correctly. He explained the process where the Land Bank will take title, do the cleanup, etc. and deliver the liability relief transferable to the developer so that the developer does not incur continuing liability. He explained the exceptions where annual inspection and monitoring would be done. There would also be an environmental land use restriction which would be registered with the State which would indicate any isolated areas. There has to be some understanding on the part of the developer as to the coordination of their planned reuse laid over the problems on the site and how are those going to be co-managed. The liability relief will assist them in achieving financing from the bank.

Arthur explained the process in detail and the regulations. The EPA is about to announce another round of funding. You would find out in May if you have received that funding. You would have to own the property for the EPA to give you funds to clean up the property. Justin emphasized keeping these timelines in mind, but not to have it drive the process.

There was discussion on levels of cleanup – we have to follow cleanup standards for residential.

VI. Establish Calendar for Future Meetings

The next meeting will be on October 9th at 5 p.m.

VII. Adjournment

Bob Passamano made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mike Massarelli. All present voted in favor, meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Cooper
Recording Secretary

This meeting was digitally taped