



MINUTES

Community Redevelopment Agency Meeting

5:30 PM – Thursday, March 06, 2025 – City Hall

Call to Order: 5:36 P.M.

Acknowledgement of Quorum and Proper Notice

PRESENT: Mr. George Asbate, Mr. Michael Holland, Vice Chair Gary Ashcraft, Chairman Willie Hawkins

ABSENT: Ms. Emily Lee

1. Approval of Minutes

1.1 Approval of Minutes

January 16, 2025 CRA Meeting

Motion made by Mr. Holland, Seconded by Vice Chair Ashcraft, to approve the Minutes. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Mr. Holland, Chair Hawkins, Vice Chair Ashcraft, Mr. Asbate

2. CRA Item with Board Discussion and Direction

2.1 Recommendation for City Commission Adoption of the Downtown Master Plan Developed by MIG, Inc.

Al Latimer, Economic Development Director, reviewed the history of the downtown master plan and the current status. He indicated it was originally expected to take nine months to complete; however, it took 18 months due to scheduling conflicts, illnesses, and weather-related events. He stated that, if approved, the plan will guide the future development and redevelopment of the downtown area. He added that there are two special notes to be considered as follows: 1) Throughout the implementation phase, community input will continue to help align projects with the goals and values of the citizens of Eustis; and 2) The Master Plan will be amended into the CRA Redevelopment Plan because otherwise CRA funds cannot be utilized for development and redevelopment activities. He stated staff's recommendation for transmittal to the Commission for consideration.

The Board confirmed that the plan was supposed to be completed within nine months with Mr. Latimer stating it officially got underway July 8, 2022, with the final presentation provided to the Commission in November 2024. Discussion was held regarding the length of time it took to complete.

Mr. Asbate stated he has quite a few concerns. He cited areas in which the plan does not meet with the direction of the Commission including the following: 1) Hire a consultant for the master plan who would provide experience in land development, economic development, master planning, land use, local government, and familiarity

with the county. He stated they ended up instead with a commercial real estate consultant. He expressed concern regarding the process used and the need for it to be more transparent. He stated he was not allowed to be part of the review process or to be present as was someone else who wanted to be there. He commented that the elected officials should have participated in the selection process to question the respondents, to see the rating system, and to see the rankings. He expressed the opinion that the process failed the board.

Mr. Asbate further stated that the Board gave direction to hire a consultant with the expertise he cited, and it is too soon to have a realtor. He added that the biggest thing is that they agreed they would have another workshop and would have an opportunity to ask questions. He expressed concern regarding having the discussion without Emily Lee being present. He stated there are four goals one of which involved infrastructure, budgeting, and public safety. He added that the Board needs to be a part of that.

Mr. Asbate expressed support for holding another workshop and the need for them being part of the selection process.

Chairman Hawkins responded that he met with the firm and asked about their prior experience. He stated the Commission does not have the time to interview five firms. He stated that's why they hire staff, and they have to allow them to do their job. He indicated support for the Commission interviewing the top two consultant applicants.

Mr. Ashcraft stated the interviews are the staff's job and commented on the amount of time spent in getting the master plan done. He indicated that the Commissioners, residents and stakeholders were all involved in creation of the plan. He commented that it is a living document that can be changed. He expressed support for transmitting to the Commission for consideration.

Mr. Holland commented that they pay professional staff to do their job. He indicated he might have liked to interview the top two but at this point they need to move forward. He emphasized that government is moving too slowly.

Mr. Asbate stated they previously agreed to hold a workshop to review the plan. He again expressed support for waiting to allow Ms. Lee to provide input. He stated that the process was not transparent. He indicated that the Commissioners are responsible and stated they should have gotten professional help in selecting the consultant. He added there is an agreement with the realtor they hired that the Commission has not seen. He expressed concern regarding having staff members reviewing the proposals and vetting the applications when they are sitting in a room with their boss. He emphasized they want independent, experienced people thinking. He emphasized the need to having the workshop, going over the master plan and reviewing the proposals. He stated that he does not have faith in the process. He commented on their financial obligation to the community to understand that part of the proposals. He emphasized the need for more transparency.

Mr. Ashcraft asked what the criteria was for the selection.

Tom Carrino, City Manager, explained the process used is laid out in the City Charter and Code of Ordinances which is used regularly for purchasing and procurement. He reviewed the process used for issuance of the RFQ (Request for Qualifications) and how it was advertised. He stated five responses were received and a staff selection committee was then selected and they reviewed the five responses at a public

meeting. He stated the committee consisted of himself, Miranda Burrowes, Rick Gierok, Mike Lane and Al Latimer and was facilitated by Purchasing Director Tracy Jeanes. He indicated it was conducted in a public meeting where they discussed their comments and arrived at a unanimous selection for number one - Goman and York. He stated their notes and scoring are all publicly available.

Mr. Carrino explained the ranking process and stated there was a unanimous number one. He stated it was close between two and three but they weren't close to the number one candidate. He stated that Levy Group was number two. He noted that it was actually a partnership between Levy, GAI and Community Solutions. He added that number three was RMA.

Mr. Asbate asked what the concern was with that partnership with Mr. Carrino explaining that they had to consider that it was a partnership so they weren't evaluating Mr. Levy but also GAI and Community Solutions. Mr. Asbate asked if he was concerned that one or the other was actually involved. He stated that Mr. Carrino had said that Dr. Levy was not really going to be involved but was named on there and in the background. He asked what that meant.

Mr. Carrino responded that in reviewing the Levy, GAI, Community Solutions Group proposal it was unclear who would be assigned what responsibilities. He stated that because of the complexity of the details and technical information included in the proposals, this is the process that is used. He commented that staff has a certain level of expertise to review the very complicated and technical documents and that is what was done in this case. He emphasized that the committee members unanimously agreed on the number one respondent.

Mr. Asbate stated that Mr. Carrino indicated it was unclear what Levy's role would be and asked if anyone else looked at that proposal, they would be unclear as to Levy's role.

Mr. Carrino clarified that it was difficult for the selection committee to determine which group would be performing what function. He gave as an example that they were required to submit resumes and experience for the participants including examples of their previous work. He stated there was a lot of information to go through and difficult to ascertain who had done work on projects most similar to the Eustis project. He pointed out that he had several conversations with Richard Levy both before the process and after the process. He noted that Mr. Levy is a former chief administrator officer and planning professional with the City of Orlando so he is very knowledgeable of the procurements processes. He stated that Mr. Levy understood the City's position.

Mr. Asbate asked if they did not see in the proposal that Mr. Levy would be the project director in charge with "an army staff" of GIA. He questioned that they did not see that Mr. Levy would be the project director. He further commented on public information he obtained regarding Mr. Levy's qualifications.

Mr. Ashcraft asked if Mr. Asbate had an affiliation with that group which Mr. Asbate denied stating he was fighting for transparency.

Mr. Ashcraft stated this is the same process used for all of the City's RFQ's.

Chairman Hawkins asked Mr. Carrino if, prior to the meeting, he had told any of the other committee members who he wanted to choose with Mr. Carrino responding negatively. Chairman Hawkins commented on his experience sitting on a selection committee for the Lake County School Board. He indicated that, despite the

committee's lack of expertise, the School Board accepted their recommendation. He emphasized that the City has a process that it has used for years and it has never been questioned. He asked if there is a relationship between GAI and either of the developers.

Mr. Carrino responded there is a relationship between G3 and GAI with Chairman Hawkins expressing concern regarding that.

Mr. Asbate stated that relationship means they have worked together not that they have a financial relationship. He stated his belief that they had actually been on conflicting sides.

Chairman Hawkins asked if there is a relationship between GAI and Dr. Levy and G3 in an organization that moved from Eustis to Mount Dora with Mr. Carrino responding affirmatively they were involved in a business relocation previously.

Further discussion was held regarding the selection process with Mr. Ashcraft noting there is a difference between the master plan and the hiring of the consultant.

Mr. Asbate stated his concern is regarding the process. He asked to have a workshop and discuss the process.

Further discussion was held regarding holding a workshop with Chairman Hawkins asking Mr. Carrino to explain why he selected Goman and York as number one.

Mr. Carrino responded that they have a lot of expensive experience in similar projects and cited their experience in a lot of different fields including redevelopment, finance, review of financials and pro formas, planning, data analysis and familiarity with the local community.

Mr. Asbate stated that their website and public information is contrary to what was said. He asked to table consideration, do a workshop and bring it back.

Mr. Holland asked to call the question.

Mr. Ashcraft moved to recommend adoption to the Commission.

Discussion was held regarding creating an adversarial situation between the Board and the City Manager with Mr. Asbate stating it is not adversarial and emphasizing he wants to be transparent.

Mr. Asbate asked about the dynamics in the relationship between Mr. Goman and Mr. Carrino.

Mr. Carrino indicated he has known Mr. Goman for a few years. He stated they met when Mr. Goman purchased a home in Eustis and introduced himself. He indicated they have had lunch several times over the past several years. He indicated there has not been a financial or business relationship with Mr. Goman.

Mr. Asbate asked if Mr. Carrino has advocated for Mr. Goman for him to get business with Mr. Carrino responding negatively.

Mr. Asbate asked again to have a workshop before deciding and interview the first two proposals.

Attorney Garcia noted the need to take a straw poll before making a motion.

Discussion was held regarding transparency with Vice Chair Ashcraft indicating that everything they do is transparent. Mr. Asbate questioned why the Board/Commission were not furnished the scoring for the proposals with Vice Chair Ashcraft responding because that's not their job. Their job is to direct the City Manager to do his job.

Mr. Carrino indicated that the process used is the same process by which the City recently selected a number of continuing services agreements including for engineers, surveys and environmental consultants. It is the process used to procure professional services.

Chairman Hawkins asked if Mr. Carrino has a relationship with Dr. Levy with Mr. Carrino responding he interned for him in the past with the City of Orlando but does not have a close relationship with him.

Mr. Asbate asked if Mr. Carrino had introduced him to Mr. Goman several years prior with Mr. Carrino responding affirmatively. Mr. Asbate asked if Mr. Carrino also asked Mr. Asbate if Mr. Goman could help him with anything in his business as Mr. Goman is an experienced realtor, broker, retired from Connecticut and asked Mr. Asbate to meet with Mr. Goman.

Mr. Carrino responded negatively and stated that his recollection was that they were having lunch in the same restaurant, and Mr. Goman came over to introduce himself.

Mr. Asbate asked if Mr. Carrino was aware that Mr. Goman emailed him on multiple occasions after that, asking to meet with him and copying the City. Mr. Carrino indicated he had no recollection of that.

Mr. Asbate presented copies of emails to the Deputy City Clerk.

Chairman Hawkins ceased Board discussion at that time and opened the public hearing.

Public hearing was opened at 6:23 p.m.

Pam Rivas expressed support for a more transparent process. She commented on what occurred at a Commission meeting with direction to hire a consultant to help the Commission so they should have had input on the selection. She stated that should be part of the process.

Attorney Garcia clarified that the procurement process is outlined in the Charter and in state statute. She indicated that it was done in a public hearing and was noticed as such. It was posted and the candidates were notified. She stated that the City has used the process and then brought before the Commission, if applicable. She noted that not all contracts go before the Commission and that is based on the amount. She explained that she reviewed the RFQ for this contract due to the nuances with G3C2 and noted there is a provision that allows the City to terminate the contract at will. They just have to provide notice within 15 days. She emphasized that the process is consistent with Florida statute and nothing was conducted privately.

Vice Chair Ashcraft confirmed that they can be dismissed after a 15-day notice.

Mr. Asbate questioned if they can modify the master plan once ratified with Attorney Garcia responding the master plan be changed if necessary. She explained that the funds can't be transferred until the master plan is adopted.

Mr. Asbate stated he asked to attend that meeting and was not allowed with Mr. Carrino stating that the ask was to be on the committee and that was not appropriate. He also stated that Ms. Rivas also asked to be on the committee. Mr. Asbate emphasized that was not the case.

Daniel DiVenanzo commented on the history with the downtown properties and emphasized that the project could be as high as a \$70 million deal. He indicated he could not find the draft agreement online. He stated he would want to make sure the consultant is not being hired to negotiate the purchase agreement (of the downtown properties) before the Board has seen anything. He emphasized this is the biggest deal that the City will face for decades. He commented on the previous deal for development of the downtown property and how it ended. He emphasized the need to have a plan in front of them before agreeing to sell the property.

Kevin Jenness, Peddler's Wagon, commented it is not bad for it to move slowly and expressed support for the three lots to be developed individually rather than in one project. He cited various issues surrounding the project including private or public parking, deliveries, etc. as well as how the lots are currently being used by the public. He encouraged them to not rush the decision but to make sure they get it right.

There being no further public comment, the hearing was closed at 6:40 p.m.

Attorney Garcia explained the need for a straw poll due to there only being four members present. She asked if there was support for tabling the issue with Chairman Hawkins suggesting it be postponed to the next meeting to allow Emily Lee to speak on the issue.

The straw poll showed two members in support of postponement (Asbate and Hawkins) and two against (Ashcraft and Holland).

Mr. Asbate moved to table consideration of Item 2.1 until they have a workshop to review the respondents. Motion died for lack of a second.

Mr. Holland confirmed any vote is strictly to recommend that it be transmitted to the Commission at a future meeting.

Motion made by Mr. Holland, Seconded by Vice Chair Ashcraft, to recommend to the City Commission consideration of the master plan. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Mr. Holland, Chair Hawkins, Vice Chair Ashcraft

Voting Nay: Mr. Asbate

2.2 CRA Resolution Number 25-01: Budget Transfer to Fund Development and Redevelopment Real Estate Consultant

Mr. Asbate asked if there was interest in postponing consideration of the resolution. It was agreed to proceed with consideration of CRA Resolution 25-01.

Mr. Latimer explained that staff estimates that the cost for the remainder of the year for the consultant would be \$80,000 with \$15,000 already being in the budget. He stated staff is asking to amend the budget to transfer \$65,000 from the CRA Reserves.

Vice Chair Ashcraft confirmed that the contract allows the City to cancel the contract with 15 days' notice.

Mr. Asbate asked to receive a copy of the contract with Goman with Mr. Carrino indicating he would provide that.

Chairman Hawkins commented that this is the same process the City has used for years and expressed concern that comments have been made that make it appear what the City is doing is underhanded.

Mr. Asbate emphasized that he is concerned about transparency and that his comments are true and accurate. He reiterated his desire for a workshop.

Discussion was held regarding the comments made during the previous item.

Attorney Garcia confirmed that the budget amendment is to provide funding but not specifically to Goman.

Mr. Carrino explained that they have begun meeting with Commissioners and G3C2 but nothing has been paid. He stated that Professional Services is already in the budget \$15,000; however, that is not sufficient; therefore, staff is asking to transfer another \$65,000 to fund to the end of the year.

The public hearing was opened at 6:54 p.m. There being no public comment, the hearing was closed at 6:54 p.m.

Motion made by Mr. Holland, Seconded by Vice Chair Ashcraft, to approve CRA Resolution Number 25-01. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Mr. Holland, Chair Hawkins, Vice Chair Ashcraft

Voting Nay: Mr. Asbate

Mr. Holland asked the board members to pay attention to the state legislature. He explained they are talking about limiting and eliminating the CRA's. He stated they have people in Tallahassee working on their behalf along with the League of Cities.

3. Adjournment: 6:56 P.M.

**These minutes reflect the actions taken and portions of the discussion during the meeting. To review the entire discussion concerning any agenda item, go to www.eustis.org and click on the video for the meeting in question. A DVD of the entire meeting or CD of the entire audio recording of the meeting can be obtained from the office of the City Clerk for a fee.*

CHRISTINE HALLORAN
City Clerk

WILLIE HAWKINS
Mayor/Commissioner