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Mayor

# New Haven Development Commission

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Michael Piscitelli  
Economic  
Development  
Administrator

Minutes  
Regular Meeting  
Wednesday, February 8, 2023  
Virtual Zoom-Based Meeting

## COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Anthony Sagnella (Chair)  
Miguel Pittman (Vice-Chair)  
Sarahi Jordan-Vega

## City Staff Present:

Michael Piscitelli, Economic Development Administrator  
Carlos Eyzaguirre, Deputy Economic Development Administrator  
Dean Mack, Economic Development Officer  
Malachi Bridges, Economic Development Officer

## Guests:

Liese Klein, New Haven Biz  
Dan McLeggon, CivicPlus  
Sarah Miller, Alder Ward 14

**Call to Order:** Meeting was opened at 8:31 am by Mr. Eyzaguirre.

## **Approval of the Previous Minutes**

Minutes were tabled due to lack of quorum.

## **Land Bank**

-Mr. Eyzaguirre opens with a general overview of the meeting, highlighting all economic recovery programming funded by the Board of Alders' \$50M+ reallocation of Federal ARPA dollars. Next, Mr. Eyzaguirre notes that we are in Phase 3 of the most recent tranche of this spending to cover costs related to developing New Haven's Land Bank. Lastly, Mr. Eyzaguirre highlights Land Bank's importance, citing that the City can have the flexibility and autonomy to acquire and dispose of properties without the typical municipal procedures, especially in this very active New Haven market.



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-Then Mr. Eyzaguirre hands the meeting off to Mr. Piscitelli, who thanks the Commissioners for their time and welcomes all attendees. Mr. Piscitelli then hands the meeting off to Dean to begin his presentation on the New Haven Land Bank.

-Mr. Mack begins his presentation by highlighting points made by Mr. Eyzaguirre and Mr. Piscitelli; the strength of the New Haven housing market creates this demand for the City to have the freedom to engage in the housing market to maintain equity and economic growth interests. Mr. Mack notes that LCI typically controls much of the City's acquisition and dispositions. Still, the lack of flexibility caused the City to miss certain opportunities, such as the vacant CVS building on Whalley Avenue that was purchased to be repurposed into a methadone clinic. If the City had a Land Bank, Mr. Mack mentioned, the City could have quickly acquired the property before private interests to retain properties that allowed them to do something beneficial for the City. As such, the Land Bank will act as an acquisition arm and extension of LCI to clean up dilapidated and/or vacant properties and get them back to homeowners and developers.

-Mr. Mack, when discussing the timeline of the Land Bank, noted that the City brought on a consultant, a real estate advisor, to assist municipalities with establishing and managing a Land Bank entity. Mr. Mack and the consultant are now drafting the bylaws, packaging them together to attract and select board members, and then presenting them to the Board of Alders (BOA) for a local ordinance. The Land Bank requires an ordinance to receive a portion of tax revenue to cover organizational costs. Mr. Mack hopes to get the Land Bank BOA approved by May, staff hired, and the entity established and ready to operate by July.

- Mr. Mack mentions Land Banks established in CT, from which New Haven took inspiration: Hartford and Waterbury. The City interviewed leadership from Hartford's and Waterbury's Land Banks, who mentioned different aims from the expected goals of New Haven. Because Hartford's housing market is not as strong, its Land Bank acquired and maintained almost 500 properties. In New Haven, there is not as much housing stock to acquire because the market is so active. Likewise, this is true in Waterbury. Though just getting started, Waterbury focuses on acquiring and maintaining blighted properties. New Haven's Land Bank differs because New Haven's goal is not to maintain properties and renovate them for resale. Instead, the City's goal is to purchase properties that would benefit economic activity and resale them after minor "cleanings" and "touch-ups."

-Mr. Mack noted that New Haven does anticipate gleaning Hartford's training program for local contractors and small-scale developers to acquire and renovate dilapidated properties. Also, New Haven is looking to replicate Waterbury's small lot program and land/property donation system. The small lot program would acquire small lots that are too small to be buildable and work out deals with neighboring homeowners to acquire or maintain the land. The donation system would allow the City to accept homeowners' donations of land and properties.

-Finally, Mr. Mack noted the budget for Land Bank is \$5M a year for three years. The budget will cover staff, acquisitions, and the inclusive growth training program. Then Mr. Mack asked team members if he missed any points. Mr. Piscitelli summarizes again why the Land Bank is needed. He underscored the time and difficulty the traditional acquisition procedure requires, which causes the City to miss countless opportunities.

### **Questions/Discussion**

-Ms. Jordan chimes in and notes that she supports the idea of the Land Bank but asks if there will be equal opportunities between developers and individual homeowners to purchase properties from the Land Bank.

-Mr. Piscitelli said the Land Bank would create a team of trusted partners and rule book procedures that manage disposition. Also noting that Land Bank acquisition will focus on properties that pose benefits to the City, such as properties that have been vacant for a while or properties that provide anchoring benefits to the community and/or the Neighborhood Commercial District.

-Mr. Sagnella asks a question like Ms. Jordan regarding Mega landlords. But Mr. Piscitelli answers by diverting the conversation from individual purchasers. Still, he wants attendees to think of the

purchasers as responsible partners who deliver homeownership daily in our community habitat. Mr. Piscitelli closes this section and hands it back off to Mr. Mack to discuss the economic ecosystem of New Haven through his economic indicators.

### **Economic Development Updates**

-Mr. Mack begins this section by discussing New Haven's unemployment numbers, noting that unemployment is down to 4% (November 2022) from 12% at the height of the Pandemic (July 2020). Likewise, the labor force participation rate increased in the second half of 2022 by 0.2%. In addition, the rate increased among Black or African Americans (0.4%), Latino or Hispanic Americans (0.6%), and White Americans (0.2%). However, the labor force participation rate decreased among Asian Americans (-.7%) and decreased (-0.2%) among women.

-Mr. Mack also notes a lack of consumer confidence, as the index was >97 in December of 2022, which indicates a pessimistic attitude towards future economic developments, possibly resulting in a tendency to save more and consume less. However, Mr. Mack notes that New Haven is thriving in housing permit activity, leading the state with 2,300 permits since 2019, while Stamford (#2) is at 1603 permits since 2019.

-Mr. Mack closes by mentioning business activity, seeing 71 businesses open by November 2022, while 61 closed that year. Mr. Mack then passes the meeting to Mr. Eyzaguirre to discuss the current RFPs and construction updates.

-Mr. Eyzaguirre begins his section on the Winchester construction update, noting the progress and discussing their presentation successes to City Plan, which resulted in their approval to amend the Planned Development District (PDD). Next, when discussing the updates of 275 Orange, Mr. Eyzaguirre again highlighted the progress, as Phase 1A has already started, and mentioned the work could be seen from the highway. Also, Mr. Eyzaguirre mentions that Ancora was also successful in their presentations to City Plan, resulting in their approval to move forward with their phase 1C, which calls for a Life Science building to be built on the parcel.

-Then Mr. Eyzaguirre discusses the RFPs. The City released various programs this fall deliberated on and approved by the Board of Alders in the Summer of 2022, including the Neighborhood Commercial Cleanup of Kimberly Square, Mill River, & Hill North (Daggett, Congress, and Davenport). The RFP has closed, and awards will be disbursed soon.

-Next, Mr. Eyzaguirre spoke on the ARPA-funded Career Pathways programming. The Board approved \$8M of ARPA funding for Career Pathways of Alders funds, including funding existing Career Pathways providers with \$100,000 grants to expand, improve, or assist their current vocational training program for youth and young adults. The RFP is closed, and respondents have been selected and announced. Two organizations have received grant agreements; eight others are still being customized.

- Finally, Mr. Eyzaguirre spoke on another ARPA Career Pathways initiative, the Strategic Planning RFP, to solicit a vendor to lead our planning and implementation of an overarching Career Pathways strategy and a potential academy. The submission portal has closed, and interviews with selected respondents of interest will begin this week.

-Mr. Eyzaguirre closes this section by quickly mentioning the National Pizza Day press event at Modern's Pizza and the Valentine's Day press event at May's Flower Shop on Dixwell.

### **Adjournment:**

Mr. Eyzaguirre adjourned the meeting. at 9:14 am.