



Pittsburgh Land Bank [PLB] Minutes
December 10, 2021

Convene:

The Chair called meeting to order.

Roll Call:

Dr. Walker called the Roll. Members Present: Rev. Ricky Burgess; Danielle Lavelle; Senator Wayne Fontana; Bobby Wilson; Steve Mazza; Wanda Wilson; Karen Brean; Dr. Jamil Bey (virtual)

The PLB Board had a physical quorum.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment.

Approval of Minutes:

◇ Motion to approve the October 2021 Board meeting minutes [**Lavelle/W.Wilson**] Passed unanimously.

Chairman's Report:

Rev. Burgess welcomed the Pittsburgh Land Bank's newest Board Member. Karen Brean joins the Land Bank with forty years of professional experience and a background in urban design and planning. Prior to working with Brean Associates, Karen worked as an intern and staff architect at Deeter Ritchey Sippel, was employed as an Urban Designer for Pittsburgh's Dept. of City Planning, served as the Executive Director of the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition, and taught Urban Design Studio at Carnegie Mellon University.

Executive's Report:

- Dr. Walker presented the Pittsburgh Land Bank – Year in Review
 - In November 2020, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) integrated the Pittsburgh Land Bank (PLB) as an affiliate entity. The PLB is now located in the URA's Development Services Unit alongside other development-focused affiliates, PHDC, PEIDC, and ELTRIDRA.
 - The URA will negotiate in good faith with the PLB Board and provide direction and support to PLB Staff.

- The PLB Manager, Greg Miller, was hired as a full-time staff member for the Land Bank in April 2021.
- The PLB has executed the GRB Law Contract, the PWSA & PLB MoU, and, upon board approval, will execute a URA & PLB MoU to allow for a seamless transfer of property.
- PLB's first property disposition is expected to close in January 2022.
- Dr. Walker will be reaching out to the Board to finalize ARPA budget allocations for the land bank in early 2022.

◇ Authorization to enter a Memorandum of Understanding between the URA & PLB [**Lavelle/B.Wilson**] Passed unanimously.

- Legal & Transactions Analyst - Matt Sanders presented the authorization to enter a Memorandum of Understanding between the PLB & URA
 - The Tri-Party Cooperation Agreement only articulates a process for transferring properties from the PLB to the URA/City but fails to provide for how properties would be transferred from the URA/City to the PLB.
 - Given the PLB's ability to quickly and efficiently convey land to end users, it is vital to execute this MoU. This MoU will eventually be incorporated into the amended Tri-Party Cooperation Agreement.
 - Matt Sanders explained that this MoU allows the PLB to move property without the additional steps that the URA adheres to (i.e., site plans, zoning, construction, etc..).
 - Rev. Burgess summarized this explanation for the Board and made it clear that the Land Bank should not have to go through the same requirements as the URA for the disposition of certain properties.
 - Councilman Wilson clarified that transfers between the City and the Land Bank are not formally recognized. Matt Sanders confirmed this saying that property transfers of this kind will become an amendment to the Tri-Party Cooperation Agreement.
 - Dr. Walker reiterated that the necessary structural and legal changes are being made to allow the Land Bank to be a mechanism for property transfer instead of a landowner.

◇ Motion to approve the GRB Law Contract [**Sen. Fontana/W.Wilson**] Passed unanimously.

- Legal & Transactions Analyst - Matt Sanders elaborated on the PLB/URA/City GRB Law Contract
 - The City of Pittsburgh owns property being held in the Pittsburgh Property Reserve (PPR) for transfer to local community groups. The PPR's purpose is to quiet the title to these community assets and return them to productive reuse.
 - The PLB wishes to support the City in quieting the titles to remaining properties in the PPR. By providing extra in-kind support, the titles will be cleared faster and transferred quicker to community groups, limiting further deterioration.
 - GRB Law has been engaged by the PLB to provide legal services directly to the City as part of a Donation Agreement between the City, PLB, and GRB Law.
 - Councilman Wilson questioned why the contract did not include all City-owned properties and how this agreement can be expanded? Dr. Walker clarified that

community groups have been waiting for the properties included in the agreement, this would give the PLB a timeline for how quickly properties like these can move into the hands of community groups. Rev. Burgess agreed that this is a small sample of properties to pilot the PLB title quieting processes.

- Director Lavelle and Director Wilson agreed that the PLB cannot take on all City-owned properties, and Matt Sanders made clear that the agreement is flexible and can be amended to include additional properties.
 - Councilman Wilson worries that certain community groups may be left behind. Dr. Walker agreed, saying that the Pittsburgh Property Reserve 2.0 will address the sins left behind by the current PPR.
 - The PLB Board will address the concerns of its Board Members in a strategic planning session slated for early 2022.
- PLB Coordinator - Emily Kauchak spoke about the Community Clean-Up
 - The Pittsburgh Land Bank co-sponsored a community clean up in Homewood. The event focused on repair work and gardening along a parcel of land maintained by Grounded Strategies.
 - The PLB is seeking to build strong partnerships with community stakeholders that maintain and steward vacant and abandoned property throughout the City. In addition to aiding with the maintenance, the Land Bank also purchased beverages for volunteers provided by two locally owned businesses, Everyday Café and Dana's Bakery.

Finance Report:

- URA's Director of Finance - Joe Karlovits reviewed the November 2021 Expenditures
 - The Board was presented with three separate reports including the November Expenditures, the YTD Net Result, and the Fund Balance Report.
 - Director Wilson would like to see more of a traditional budget vs. actual with staff expenses included. She reiterated that the Board of Directors cannot do the work expected of them without quality reports from PLB/URA Staff. Joe Karlovits assured her that PLB will receive high quality services from the URA or another outside entity.
 - Dr. Walker made it clear that the PLB would not overpay for these services but select the organization that best meets the expectations of the PLB Board.

Legislative Updates:

Senator Fontana discussed the following:

- Municipal Claims Tax Lien Law (MCTTL)
 - SB 811 is stalled in committee until movement expected in January 2022
 - HB 610 – which grants the PLB protection regarding environmental liabilities -- has gone through committee and is waiting for movement
 - Sen. Fontana believes strongly that these are bi-partisan issues, and hopes that they will both become effective

New Business

- There was no new business

Public Comment:

Lou Duplantier, a VISTA working for the City of Pittsburgh, commented on the desire for an increase in urban agriculture within the City. There are many growers seeking long-term access to land in ways that prioritize urban agriculture. How could the Land Bank aid in these land ownership initiatives and play a bigger role for community stakeholders?

How could community members/groups petition certain properties to be added to the Pittsburgh Property Reserve for title work done on behalf of the City of Pittsburgh?

Closing Remarks:

Rev. Burgess brought to the Board's attention the number of community stakeholders with invested interests in PLB projects. There are many emotions involved in vacant land revitalization, but the Land Bank will need a transparent and objective process that clearly evaluates a property's potential. Rev. Burgess evoked an example from his hometown involving a property that was torn down for a beneficial use despite a community's push to preserve it. Ultimately, the emotions tied to a building are not enough to save it, and if the Land Bank cannot distinguish between passion and practicality, then there will be projects that do not have an appropriate end use. The possibilities of vacant land are endless, and community members should dream big, but the Land Bank must be realistic.

Happy Holidays, Everyone!

Adjournment:

The Chair called for adjournment.

◇ Motion to adjourn. **[Rev. Burgess/B.Wilson]** Passed unanimously.