
Blighted Property Review Committee
Wednesday, May 29, 2024
Hybrid Meeting

BPRC Attendance: P. Rye, C. Miller, A. Woodward, A. Boyd and J. Keith - in person

Staff Attendance: L. Kelleher and H. Scheuring – in person and M. Mayfield - virtually

Mr. Rye called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. He asked those present to introduce themselves.

Review June 6th Certification Property Summary Sheets

The group reviewed the existing conditions listed on the summary sheets for the Determination Hearing.

1. 225 Cedar St. Albert Martorell, owner, 223 ½ Cedar St., Reading PA 19601, Purchased Nov 2013 – no contact from the owner since the April hearing
3. 105 Peach St, Julio Reyes, owner, 102 S 9th St Reading PA, Purchased June 1999
4. 471 Birch St, Lance Russell III, owner, 471 Birch St Reading Pa, Purchased June 1992
5. 429 A Locust St, Amazon Real Estate LLC, owner, 3229 State Hill Rd, Reading PA, Purchased August 2023 – recommend motion to table if the owner agrees to an interior inspection by Property Maintenance
6. 418 Douglass St, JAFT LLC, owner, 434 West St, Pottstown PA, Purchased June 2020
8. 645 N 9th St, JAFT LLC, owner, 434 West St, Pottstown PA, Purchased unavailable
9. 604 N 9th St., Marco Castro, owner, 418 Green Tc, Reading, Purchased Sept 2017 – recommend motion to table if the owner agrees to an interior inspection by Property Maintenance
11. 1035 Muhlenberg St., Cesarz Nunez, owner, 533 A Maple St Reading, Purchased Sept 2013

14. 631 Elm St., Gladys Castillo, owner, 4114 7th Ave, Temple PA, Purchased Nov 2023

15. 1132 Green St., Leonardo Gomez, owner, 270 Empire Blvd, Brooklyn NY, Purchased Jan 2022

16. 1411 Cotton St., Golden Circle Realty LLC, owner, PO Box 664 Adamstown PA, Purchased July 2022

17. 338 Pearl St., Golden Circle Realty LLC, owner, PO Box 664 Adamstown PA, Purchased July 2022

23. 849 Church St., ANG Homebuyers LLC, owner, 9015 148th St Jamaica NY, Purchased Oct 2023

Update on Target Properties

- **122-124 S 8th St. Rehab** property has an existing \$70,000 mortgage from 2012, no due date referenced. Has a couple RAWA claims and tax claims for 2022; and
- **1035 Muhlenberg St. Rehab** property has no mortgage but has tax claims and RAWA liens.
- **331 N 6th St. Rehab** property has an existing \$22,750 mortgage from 2004 Debt due by 2034. There are also several City and RAWA municipal liens;
- **1132 Green St Demo** - status

The Committee members had some lengthy discussions on the need for the Reading Redevelopment Authority (RRA) to undertake eminent domain or one of the other acquisition methods to get these derelict properties in the hands of responsible owners.

Also noted was the need to encourage current owners to rehab and flip properties due to the current state of the real estate market, where sales prices for all types of properties within Reading are soaring.

The Committee agreed that it is time for the RRA to define an evaluation process for the conditions (tax delinquencies, RAWA liens, etc.) at the property will determine the proper acquisition method. For example, 1035 Muhlenberg St (listed above) does not have a mortgage but has tax claims and RAWA liens making this an excellent property for the foreclosure process. *(Note properties with mortgages should not be considered for acquisition)*

In response to a question, Ms. Scheuring stated that Property Maintenance clerks prepare liens for properties that have had conditions remediated using a 3rd party contractor. After the liens are prepared, they are filed with the Prothonotary by the Law Department.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the last property that was acquired by eminent domain was a property on Chestnut Street. The Berks County Redevelopment Authority wanted to acquire the property and the RRA Solicitor filed the required paperwork for a fee of \$5,000 which was paid by the County Redevelopment Authority. Overall, approximately 7 properties were acquired by eminent domain between 2010 and 2014 (*Note there was one property acquired by foreclosure in the 700 block of North 4th Street*)

Ms. Scheuring noted the number of calls she receives from people wanting to purchase certified properties and the lack of a process for those people to use.

The need for the RRA to define a process to evaluate the certified properties, employ the available acquisition processes based on the conditions at the property, define a process that provides a path for people to acquire a blighted property and define a process to identify reliable people to transfer the property to when the property is acquired.

After Ms. Scheuring described the process Property Maintenance uses to enforce the Quality-of-Life ordinance, Ms. Mayfield stated that after a property receives two guilty violations at the MDJ level, a misdemeanor can be filed by the Reading Police Department.

Going back to the Target Properties, Ms. Scheuring stated that the owner of 1132 Green Street (originally slated for demolition) has contacted a structural engineer who will determine if the property is structurally sound and eligible for rehab. The property was fenced off by the City.

Several committee members noted the extreme number of properties that are structurally unsafe that have been fenced off by the City. Ms. Scheuring was asked to inquire about the amount the City currently spends to rent this fencing.

Ms. Mayfield stated that she is working with Ms. Krishock, RRA Solicitor, to discover if any of the target properties listed above have had a change in ownership and must go through the certification process again.

Ms. Mayfield stated that at the January work session, the need to perform interior inspections at properties slated for rehab along with the difficulties Property Maintenance has connecting with property owners was discussed. A meeting was scheduled with the administration to obtain permission to file for an administrative search warrant. The administration did not object and Property Maintenance is to work with the Law Department when the need for an administrative search warrant is identified.

2025 Meeting Cycle

Ms. Scheuring stated that the CD Director wants to increase the number of hearing cycles per year and increase the number of properties to 30-40 per cycle. She stated that as her new “blight” position separates her from her prior Property Maintenance duties, she can handle a more aggressive schedule. She asked the board if they would agree to meeting monthly with hearing cycles in February/April, June/August and October/December with work sessions the week prior to each hearing.

The board agreed to the increased schedule starting in 2025. It was noted that this increase would quickly add more certified properties to the list increasing the need for action by the RRA.

Amendment to Hearing Policy

The Committee reviewed the suggested modifications to the hearing policy shown in bold italics and strikethrough. Ms. Scheuring stated that the modifications will update the policy to the practices currently used – providing the property owners with 30 days’ notice, rather than 60 days.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the other major change is the inclusion of filing a Condemnation Notice after the property is certified, as that safeguards the certification status if the property changes owners, along with the Decertification Notice if the property no longer meets the blight criteria. These notices are filed with the County Recorder of Deeds and are attached to the property deed.

After a brief discussion, Mr. McMahon moved, seconded by Mr. Boyd, to adopt the proposed modifications to the hearing policy. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Miller moved, seconded by Mr. Keith, to adjourn the meeting at approximately 7:45 pm. No one objected.

2024 Hearing Schedule

- **Certification Hearing – Thursday June 6th @ 6 pm**
 - ~~Work Session Wednesday May 29th @ 6 pm~~
- **Determination Hearing – Thursday August 1st @ 6 pm**
 - Work Session Wednesday July 24th @ 6 pm
- **Certification Hearing – Thursday October 3rd @ 6 pm**
 - Work Session Wednesday September 25th @ 6 pm

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher, Secretary