
Blighted Property Review Committee
Thursday, March 18, 2020
Virtual Meeting
Determination Hearing
Meeting Report

Mr. Urena, Chair, called the Determination Hearing to order at 6:01 pm. He announced that a quorum was present.

Due to the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration, the public is unable to physically attend the meeting. The public participation is provided via virtual meeting application. All attendees are participating remotely by phone or electronically through a computer application.

Mr. Urena announced that the purpose of the hearing is to consider if the conditions of the properties on the agenda meet any of the 12 conditions defined by the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law of 1945, as amended, and the City of Reading Blighted Property Review Committee Ordinance, and can be determined as blighted.

BPRC Attendance: J. Cepeda-Freytiz, L. Olsen, H. Urena, M. Wolfe - electronically

Staff Attendance: L. Kelleher, A. LaMano Esq., H. Scheuring - electronically

Mr. Urena stated that the minutes from the September Certification hearing were distributed electronically. He asked if any committee member wished to make corrections or changes.

Mr. Olsen moved, seconded by Ms. Wolfe, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion was approved unanimously.

PROPERTIES TO BE REMOVED FROM THE PROCESS

Mr. Urena stated that there are 23 properties to be removed from the certification list at this meeting.

Mr. Olsen moved, seconded by Ms. Wolfe, to approve the de-certification of the properties listed on the agenda. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. LaMano reviewed the hearing process. Property packets were emailed to the property owners registered to attend the meeting on March 17, 2021.

DETERMINATION HEARING

13. 110 S 6th St, Carlos Jose Ventura, owner, 359 W Douglass St, Rdg, Purchased June 2016

Ms. Kelleher introduced Jaime Mas, translator from Global Arena to Mr. Ventura. Ms. Kelleher issued the oath to Mr. Ventura, with assistance from the translator.

Ms. LaMano entered the following conditions into the record from the property summary sheet as follows:

- Notice mailed to the property owner via first class mail on February 10, 2021
- Delinquent water charges \$3063.49 Water on
- Delinquent taxes \$7011.83 2018-20 City, County, School
- Gas service N/A
- Electric service N/A
- Delinquent Taxes \$7,011.32 2018-19 City, County, School
- Trades – N/A
- Codes – 2 NoV, \$1750 total unpaid 5 QoL Trash, 1 QoL Indoor Furniture Outdoors
- Delinquent Trash and Recycling – N/A

With assistance from the translator, Mr. Ventura listed the water payments and tax payments he has made since 2018 and he expressed the belief that he paid enough to satisfy the 2018 tax delinquency. He stated that he had the payment receipts but the Board could not view them because Mr. Ventura did not have his camera activated and when asked to activate his camera he stated that he could not make the video feature work.

With assistance from the translator, Mr. Ventura stated that after receiving many fines from the City, mostly for trash that was dumped on his property by others and finding it difficult to balance paying the fines along with the other property expenses, he went to speak with Mayor Scott about the problem who advised him to move into the property and he stated that he moved into the property. He stated that he plans to renovate the property and he paid a contractor \$50,000 to renovate the commercial space on the first floor; however, the contractor passed away and the money was not refunded. He asked for guidance on resolving the issues and stopping the fines and stated that he would sell the property if the situation cannot be resolved.

Mr. Urena inquired about the date the photo of the property shared by Ms. Scheuring was taken. Ms. Scheuring stated that she took the photo on March 5th.

With assistance from the translator, Mr. Ventura stated that he painted over the graffiti that appears on the boards covering the first floor windows and that he installed the boards to prevent theft at the property. He stated that he resides in the upper floors of the property.

Mr. Urena noted that the property is an eyesore and he asked Ms. Scheuring if she could advise Mr. Ventura on curing the problems at the property. Ms. Scheuring stated that due to

the language barrier, she had Mr. Ventura speak with Property Improvement Manager Rudy Estrada who conveyed the requirements to Mr. Ventura.

Mr. Ventura countered that Mr. Estrada provided no advice and only instructed him to contact Ms. Kelleher. He stated that the white graffiti appearing in the photo is new graffiti and that he painted over the former green graffiti.

In response to a question from Mr. Urena, Mr. Ventura stated that his property passed each inspection and he was unavailable for the inspection scheduled for March 22nd.

Ms. Scheuring stated that the property did pass the inspection that occurred in 2017 and that the property was due for a new inspection.

Mr. Ventura stated that in 2017 he was told that inspections occur every five years so the next inspection should not be scheduled until 2022. Ms. Scheuring stated that inspections are scheduled every 2-5 years and she explained how the inspections are scheduled. Mr. Ventura stated that he understands.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the last inspection was in 2017 and if Mr. Ventura resides at the property. Mr. Ventura agreed that the last inspection was in 2017 and that he lives in the upper floors and wants to renovate the commercial space on the 1st floor.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz asked Ms. Scheuring if there were rental permits for the property. Ms. Scheuring stated that this property is a three unit – 2 residential units in the upper levels and a 1st floor commercial space – and that \$740 is due for past due housing registration payments. Mr. Ventura expressed the belief that he paid 2017-18 and as he now resides at the property there is no need for him to pay the registration fee.

Mr. Ventura again began speaking about all the receipts he has for the payment of the various delinquencies. Ms. LaMano stated that the Board is unable to view the receipts without the video functioning. Mr. Ventura questioned why the Board cannot simply accept his word.

Ms. LaMano explained the hearing process and the need for the Board to be able to view the receipts. She suggested delaying a decision until Mr. Ventura can provide copies of the receipts.

Mr. Urena suggested tabling the property.

Mr. Ventura disconnected from the meeting. *(Note Mr. Ventura contacted the Council Office on Friday to report that he lost his internet connection)*

Mr. Olsen noted that this property is within a historic district. He explained the need for building permits prior to the renovation of the property and the probable need for some type of fire wall separation between the commercial space and the rental units. He stated that tabling the property would provide time for permits, etc.

Ms. LaMana noted that it was unknown if Mr. Ventura intentionally disconnected from the meeting or if he had internet problems.

Public Comment

There was no public comment for this property.

Mr. Olsen moved, seconded by Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz, to table this property until the August Determination Hearing to allow further evaluation. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Kelleher thanked Mr. Mas for assisting with the translation for Mr. Ventura and stated that he was free to disconnect from the meeting.

19. 42 N 11th St, Avalex Investments LLC, owner, 64 E Uwchlan Ave., Suite 262 Exton, Purchased June 2011

Ms. Kelleher issued the oath to Steve Jones of Avalex.

Ms. LaMano entered the following conditions into the record from the property summary sheet as follows:

- Notice mailed to the property owner via first class mail on February 10, 2021
- Delinquent water charges N/A Water off
- Delinquent taxes N/A
- Gas service N/A
- Electric service N/A
- Delinquent Taxes N/A
- Trades – N/A
- Codes – 1 Work Order, \$1450 total unpaid, 3 QoL Trash, 2 QoL Weeds, 1 QoL Snow/Ice
- Delinquent Trash and Recycling – N/A

Mr. Jones stated that he and his partners own several investment properties in Reading and that a few years ago a faulty roof was installed on this property creating the problems at the property. He stated that he recently had a roofer and contractor at the property to determine if there were any structural deficiencies or if the property could be repaired. He stated that after the repair to the exterior is complete work will begin on the interior.

Mr. Jones stated that all the other properties are occupied and all attention will be placed on repairing this property.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz asked if the property is vacant or occupied. Mr. Jones stated that the property has been vacant for several years.

Mr. Urena inquired if a rehab agreement has been submitted. Ms. Scheuring stated that the property was last inspected in 2012 (passed); however, more recent inspections were continually rescheduled by Avalex. Inspections were cancelled due to the pandemic but they are now restarting.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired about why the inspection was delayed for so long and how this property was selected for tonight's hearing.

Mr. Urena explained that properties are identified in multiple ways from staff to citizens. Ms. Scheuring stated that she could not determine exactly why the building was not scheduled for an inspection within the 2-5 year timeframe. She noted that the property was considered for this hearing due to complaints from neighboring properties.

Public Comment

There was no public comment for this property.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz moved, seconded by Mr. Olsen, to table this property until the August Determination Hearing. The motion was approved unanimously.

Consent Agenda

Ms. LaMano stated that the following properties do not have representation at this hearing and each property meets at least one (1) of the required blight criteria as follows. (*Note the numbers match those on the Property Summary Sheets*)

All properties received notice of the hearing mailed February 10, 2021. No properties required posting.

1. 801 N 10th St, Nioman and Francia Taveras, Owner, 377 Hazel St., Rdg., purchased Nov 2006 Tabled at the July 2020 Determination Hearing - Delinquent taxes \$15,291.48 2018-19 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$15,291.48; Water off 2013; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 2 Work Orders, 6 NoV, 5 QoL trash, 10 QoL weeds, 2 QoL snow/ice, \$4596.31 total unpaid

2. 1743 Thorn St, Eugene Sarge, 1727 Thorn St., Rdg. Purchased Feb 1993 - Delinquent taxes \$1362.09 2019-20 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$6621.89; Water off 2016; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 3 Work Orders, Failed inspection 2018, 13 NoV, 3 Work orders, \$7790 total unpaid

3. 466 N. Front St., Breno Arruda & Manuel Teixeira, owner, PO Box 1218 Mountainside NJ,

Purchased Jan 2019 - Delinquent taxes \$2357.63 2019-20 City, County, School; Delinquent water N/A; Water abandoned; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 3 Work Orders, 3 NoV, 5 QoL trash, 16 QoL weeds, \$1020 total unpaid

4. 210 Maple St, Song Kee Yeo/RPC Global Inc, owner, 10816 Fallstone Rd Suite 500 Houston TX, Purchased April 2018 - Delinquent taxes \$20,929.94 2017-20 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$64,279.13; Water off 2012; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – Failed Inspection 11/16/20, Placard 2013, 15 QoL trash, 14 QoL weeds \$5435.44 total unpaid

5. 728 Chestnut St, Lourdes Castillo, owner, 905 Bender St, Rdg 19605, Purchased Sept 2020 - Delinquent taxes N/A; Delinquent water \$72.39; Water off 2019; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 3 QoL trash, 3 QoL weeds, 1 QoL snow/ice, \$75 total unpaid

6. 306 S 6th St, Citimortgage Inc/Enerbank USA, owner, 14700 Citicorp Dr MC 0251 Hagerstown MD, Purchased July 2018 - Delinquent taxes \$7180.45; Delinquent water \$2100.36; Water off 2018; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 8 Work Orders, 8 NoV, Failed inspection 2012, Placard unsafe 2014, 16 QoL trash, 5 QoL weeds, 1 QoL Indoor furniture outdoors, \$7976.93 total unpaid

9. 413 S 9th St, Antero & Wanda Olivo, owner, 413 S 9th, Reading, Purchased March 2012 - Delinquent taxes \$4532.62 2018-20 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$2906.42; Water off 2015; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 4 Work Orders, 6 NoV, Placard unsafe 2014 2 QoL trash, 2 QoL weeds, 1 QoL snow/ice, \$1265.17 total unpaid

10. 1039 Buttonwood St, Shane Overton, owner, 320 S Baumstown Rd, Birdsboro, Purchased May 2016 - Delinquent taxes \$1453.04 2016-20 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$5496.30; Water off 2013; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 1 Work Order, 2 NoV, Failed Inspection 2016, 1 QoL weeds, 2 QoL Trash \$16,257.50 total unpaid

11. 802 Muhlenberg St, Hannah Tesfaye & Waldia Arega, owner, PO Box 2956 Ann Arbor MI, Purchased Dec 2012 - Delinquent taxes \$515.32; Delinquent water \$344.30; Water off 2018; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 4 Work Orders, 2 NoV, Placard unlawful 2013, 7 QoL trash, 1 QoL weeds, 1 QoL snow/ice, \$3159.19 total

12. 622 Pine St, Jermaine Martin, owner, 622 Pine St, Reading, Purchased Oct 2002 1997 - Delinquent taxes \$6215.46 2017-20 City, County, School, Delinquent water \$7500.39; Water off 2012; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes –3 NoV, Failed inspection 2012, Placarded unlawful 2012, 1 QoL weeds, \$35 total unpaid

14. 735 McIlvain St, Jessica Benson, owner, 5837 Arch St., Philadelphia, Purchased April 2020 - Delinquent taxes N/A; Delinquent water \$650.57; Water off 2013; Electric N/A; Gas

N/A; Trades N/A; Codes –Placard unlawful 2016, 4 QoL Trash, \$18,570 total unpaid

15. 536 Johnson St, Lucas Romero, owner, 537 Tulpehocken St, Reading, Purchased Aug 2013 - Delinquent taxes \$398.98 2020 City, County, School; Delinquent water N/A; Water abandoned; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 3 Nov, 1 QoL trash, 1 QoL weeds, \$1050 total unpaid

16. 427 Spruce St., Orlando Delgado Nieves, owner, 331 Spruce St, Reading, Purchased Dec 2006 - Delinquent taxes \$6224.46 2017-20 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$5407.16; Water off 2016; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 2 Work Order, 2 NoV, 4 QoL trash, 1 QoL weeds, 1 QoL animal waste, \$495.50 total unpaid

17. 1103 Spruce St, Ronald & Stephen Dombrowski, owner, 77 Foxview Rd., Honeybrook, Purchased March 1950 - Delinquent taxes \$3364.34 2019-20 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$7962.71; Water off 2012; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 3 Work Orders, 2 NoV, Failed inspection 2015, 3 QoL trash, 9 QoL weeds, \$8684.25 total unpaid

18. 115 N 9th St, Dominga Tejada, owner, 237 S 5th St., Rdg, Purchased May 2004 - Delinquent taxes \$4214.95 2018-20 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$12,810.89; Water off 2015; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 5 NoV, Failed Inspection 2014, 1 QoL trash, 1 QoL motor vehicle nuisance, \$919.87 total unpaid

A meeting attendee introduced himself as Mr. Gomez and announced his intention to purchase #18 - 115 N 9th Street.

Ms. LaMano noted that Mr. Gomez is not the owner of record but the Board can consider hearing this property separately.

Public Comment

None.

Mr. Olsen moved, seconded by Ms. Wolfe, to remove #18, 115 N 9th from the Consent Agenda for separate consideration and to determine the consent agenda properties as blighted. The motion was approved unanimously.

Determination Hearing

18. 115 N 9th St, Dominga Tejada, owner, 237 S 5th St., Rdg, Purchased May 2004

Ms. LaMano entered the following conditions into the record from the property summary sheet as follows:

- Notice mailed to the property owner via first class mail on February 10, 2021
- Delinquent water charges \$12,810.89 Water off 2015
- Delinquent taxes - \$4214.95 2018-20 City, County, School

- Gas service N/A
- Electric service N/A
- Delinquent Taxes N/A
- Trades – N/A
- Codes – 5 NoV, \$919.87 total unpaid, Failed inspection 2014, 1 QoL Trash, 1 QoL Motor vehicle nuisance
- Delinquent Trash and Recycling – N/A

Ms. LaMano reminded everyone that Mr. Gomez is not the owner of record. The Board allowed Mr. Gomez to testify.

Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Mr. Gomez.

Mr. Gomez stated that the property is being handled by an estate and the executor has decided to sell the properties. He has been negotiating with the executor and recently paid off the taxes as a sign of good faith. He stated that he was made aware of the delinquent water charges also. A construction company visited the property and they are preparing an estimate to restore this property to a reputable rental property.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz inquired if the property is vacant. Mr. Gomez stated that the property has been vacant for some time. Ms. Scheuring stated that it is safe to assume that the property has been vacant since 2015 when the water utility was disconnected. However, she noted that there have been instances where properties without water service were occupied.

Mr. Urena and Mr. Olsen encouraged Mr. Gomez to continue to work to take ownership of the property and to keep in touch with Ms. Scheuring. Mr. Urena noted that having the property approved at the Determination Hearing is not the end of the process. There will be a chance to reconsider the property at the May 20 Certification Hearing.

Public Comment

There was no public comment for this property.

Ms. Wolfe moved, seconded by Mr. Olsen, to determine this property as blighted. The motion was approved unanimously.

Other Business

The Board noted the improvement through having a professional translator present to assist with Spanish speaking property owners and thanked Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz for working to get this funding included in the Council office budget.

The Board thanked Ms. Scheuring for her work to find properties that no longer meet the criteria. Ms. Scheuring explained that she first checked to see if the properties passed a recent

inspection and if they did she then checked for delinquent water and taxes, finding the list of properties on the agenda. She noted that there are 50-60 properties more in the pipeline.

No other business was brought forward. Mr. Urena announced that the certification hearing will be held on Thursday, May 20, 2021

Mr. Olsen moved, seconded by Mr. Cepeda-Freytiz, to adjourn the hearing.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, Secretary