
Blighted Property Review Committee
Thursday, June 6, 2024
Council Chambers & Hybrid
Certification Hearing
Meeting Report

Mr. Rye called the Certification Hearing to order at 6:07 pm. He stated that a quorum is present. He asked Ms. Mayfield to conduct the hearing.

Ms. Mayfield announced the purpose of the hearing is to consider the conditions on the properties listed on the agenda to determine if they meet the Blighted Property criteria in accordance with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law of 1945, as amended, and the City of Reading Blighted Property Review Committee Ordinance as amended by Bill #12-2024, and codified in the City of Reading City Code in Chapter 23, Part 9.

BPRC Attendance: J. Keith, T. McMahon, A. Woodward– in person and P. Rye, A. Boyd - virtually

Staff Attendance: M. Mayfield, Esq., H. Scheuring, and L. Kelleher – in person

Ms. Mayfield asked the members present to consider the agenda for this meeting.

Ms. Woodward moved, seconded by Mr. McMahon, to approve the agenda for this meeting. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Mayfield asked the members present to consider the minutes from the April Determination meeting distributed electronically.

Mr. McMahon moved, seconded by Mr. Keith, to approve the minutes as distributed electronically. The motion was approved unanimously.

PROPERTIES TO BE REMOVED FROM THE PROCESS

None.

JAFT LLC, owner of 418 Douglass St. and 645 N 9th St. stated that they would be present at the hearing; however, no representatives were present. Ms. Mayfield suggested utilizing the 15-minute court rule. No one objected.

Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Ms. Scheuring.

Ms. Scheuring recommended tabling 429 Locust St., 604 N 9th St. and 849 Church St. She stated that each of these properties have new owners, and each property has had significant improvements. She stated that each property owner was mailed a letter informing them that their agreement to allow an interior inspection at the property will enable the Board to table their property until the October Certification Hearing. Ms. Scheuring stated that she will monitor these properties over the upcoming three months.

Mr. McMahon moved, seconded by Ms. Woodward, to table 429 Locust St., 604 N 9th St and 849 Church St. The motion was approved unanimously.

Consent Agenda

Ms. Schuering 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*)

The representative from JAFT LLC arrived at 6:15 pm.

All properties received notice of the hearing mailed April 30, 2024.

1. 225 Cedar St. Albert Martorell, owner, 223 ½ Cedar St., Reading PA 19601, Purchased Nov 2013 – Delinquent water charges \$14,227.65, Water off 2006, Delinquent taxes \$2400.05 2022-23 City, County, School, Gas service N/A, Electric service N/A, Trades – N/A, Property Maintenance – 2 NoV, Failed Inspection 9-13-12, 5 QoL Trash, 5 QoL Weeds, & 7 QoL Motor vehicle nuisance, 1 QoL Indoor furniture outdoors, \$8845 unpaid fees *Note: delinquent Water includes sewer, trash, and recycling*

3. 105 Peach St, Julio Reyes, owner, 102 S 9th St Reading PA, Purchased June 1999 - Delinquent taxes \$2024.01 2021-23; Delinquent water - No Water Service; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes –4 NoV, 1 QoL trash

4. 471 Birch St, Lance Russell III, owner, 471 Birch St Reading Pa, Purchased June 1992 Delinquent taxes \$6521.63 2018-23 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$9857.72; Water on; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – \$945 total unpaid, 2 NoV, 6 QoL trash, 6 QoL weeds, 2 QoL animal waste, 8 QoL indoor furniture outdoors

11. 1035 Muhlenberg St., Cesarz Nunez, owner, 533 A Maple St Reading, Purchased Sept 2013 - Delinquent taxes \$682.02 2022-23 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$12720.13; Water off 2012; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 6 Work Order, 3 NoVs, Placard unlawful 7-9-13, 8 QoL trash, 8 QoL weeds, \$9622.07 unpaid

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

Delinquent water charges \$5358.43, Water off 2012, Delinquent taxes \$832.41 2023 City, County, School, Gas service N/A, Electric service N/A, fenced off to protect the public, Codes – 3 Work order, 7 NoV, \$3969 total unpaid, 2 QoL Trash, 4 QoL Weeds *Note: delinquent Water includes sewer, trash, and recycling*

16. 1132 Green St., Leonardo Gomez, owner, 270 Empire Blvd, Brooklyn NY, Purchased Jan 2022 - Delinquent taxes \$843.74 2023 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$529.47; Water off 2013; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Codes – 3 Work Orders, 10 NoVs, Placard unlawful 2016, 1 QoL trash, 5 QoL weeds, 1 QoL ice, \$27837.81 unpaid

17 1411 Cotton St., Golden Circle Realty LLC, owner, PO Box 664 Adamstown PA, Purchased July 2022 - Delinquent taxes \$13440.78 2016-23 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$13456.74; Water off; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 12 NoV, 7 Work order, Failed inspection 9-8-22, 8 QoL trash, 19 QoL weeds, 3 QoL ice, \$38047.08 unpaid

18. 338 Pearl St., Golden Circle Realty LLC, owner, PO Box 664 Adamstown PA, Purchased July 2022 - Delinquent taxes \$19841.96 2009-23 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$14671.56; Water off 2012; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 10 Work orders, 17 NoV, Failed inspection 9-8-22, 4 QoL trash, 22 QoL weeds, 1 QoL indoor furniture outdoors, \$12368.96 unpaid

Public Comment

None.

Mr. Rye moved, seconded by Mr. McMahon, to certify the Consent Agenda properties. The motion was approved unanimously.

Certification Hearing

6. 418 Douglass St, JAFT LLC, owner, 434 West St, Pottstown PA, Purchased June 2020

Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Ms. Guzman, the property manager representing JAFT LLC.

Ms. Scheuring read the conditions into the record as follows:

Notice mailed 4-30-24; Delinquent taxes \$1050.35 2023 City, County, School; Delinquent water \$2060.39 – Water on; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades – N/A; Codes – 1 Work Order, 10 NoV, Failed Inspection 12-22-22; 2 QoL Trash, 4 QoL Weeds, \$1162.49 unpaid

Ms. Guzman stated that after the LLC purchased the property in 2020, their various City applications got stalled due to the Covid shutdown. She stated that they had a One Stop meeting in July 2023 to learn what they were required to do at the property but no one from

the City contacted them afterwards. She stated that they requested names of companies where they could purchase replacement windows and wooden rails that are HARB compliant. She stated that she has many email messages sent to various City offices with no response as evidence. She noted that although she never had a response from Ms. Johnson in the HARB office, they went ahead and painted the property blue. She also displayed the in-kind rails purchased for the front porch.

In response to a question from Mr. McMahon, Ms. Guzman stated that the entire interior has been rehabbed. She stated that they would like to complete the exterior improvements by the end of June.

Ms. Scheuring stated that this property was inspected in December 2022. She noted that this is a recertification due to the change in ownership.

Ms. Guzman expressed the belief that the majority of the Property Maintenance delinquency is made up of No Show fees related to inspections. She stated that prior to each inspection she emailed Property Maintenance 24 hours in advance to change the date of the inspection and each time she was deemed a no show.

In response to a question from Mr. Rye, Ms. Guzman stated that they obtained the required building permits for the interior renovation work.

In response to questions from Ms. Mayfield, Ms. Guzman stated they are aware of the tax and water delinquencies and plan to go on payment plans when the property is occupied by a tenant.

Ms. Scheuring stated that of the \$1162 unpaid to Property Maintenance, \$1000 is the responsibility of the current owner.

Ms. Mayfield recommended tabling the property and ordering the property owner to reduce the amount of delinquencies.

Public Comment

There was no public comment for this property.

Mr. McMahon moved, seconded by Mr. Rye, to table 418 Douglass St until the October Certification Hearing and ordering the reduction of the water, tax and property maintenance delinquencies. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Scheuring stated that she will help Ms. Guzman connect with the HARB office.

8. 645 N 9th St, JAFT LLC, owner, 434 West St, Pottstown PA, Purchase date unavailable - Delinquent taxes \$506.52 2023 City, County, School; Delinquent water – service abandoned; Electric N/A; Gas N/A; Trades N/A; Codes – 14 Work Order, 8 NoV, Failed inspection 10-25-23; Placard unsafe 2017; 29 QoL trash, 24 QoL weeds, 1 QoL indoor furniture outdoors, \$20890.01 total unpaid

Ms. Guzman stated that they experienced the same One Stop problems with this property. She stated that at the meeting a City representative offered to provide her with a copy of the engineering report for 647 N. 9th Street (Note the 3rd floor of 645 N 9th St. was demolished) and she stated that 647 N. 9th experienced some structural compromise during the demolition process. She stated that the engineering report for the adjoining property was never provided. They have an engineering report for their property at 645 N 9th Street. She stated that the Deputy CD Director called her to a meeting in his office and he advised her that if the owner of 647 N 9th St. would not provide a copy of their engineering report, then any resulting damage associated with the rehabilitation of the property is that person's responsibility.

Ms. Guzman described her difficulty navigating the zoning process, noting that it took an entire year for the zoning office to review and deny her application for a two unit rental. She stated that she is now required to resubmit a new application for a two unit rental. She expressed the belief that the Zoning Board will approve an appeal or variance for the two units as the majority of the properties in this neighborhood are currently two units or more. She added that they meet the off-street parking requirements for a two unit and that she has plans prepared for a two unit and a single unit. She noted that they wish to replace the 3rd floor.

In response to a question from Mr. Rye, Ms. Guzman stated that all the design work has been completed and they are prepared to begin working on the rehab as soon as they receive zoning approval. She noted her intent to submit the engineering report to Building Trades in the meantime. She complained about the amount of time it takes to go through the various City approval processes.

Mr. Rye countered that he could cite property after property that had none of the difficulties that Ms. Guzman claims to have had. He noted that if the property owner follows the instructions and submits the required documentation applications are approved very quickly. He next explained that the One Stop meetings are advisory for the property owner and that staff attending these meetings provide information to the applicant about the various requirements associated with the application process.

Ms. Guzman became argumentative and asked Mr. Rye to stop attacking her.

Mr. McMahon interjected and stated that Mr. Rye is not on the attack, he is simply seeking

clarifying information and describing the approval processes for those who follow the instructions. He noted that the One Stop meetings started when he was mayor and the description provided by Mr. Rye is accurate.

Ms. Scheuring stated that \$840 of the \$20890.01 delinquency is the responsibility of JAFT LLC.

Mr. Rye inquired if Ms. Guzman is prepared to submit a permit application to Building/Trades when she receives Zoning approval.

Ms. Scheuring screenshared the plans submitted for 645 N. 9th St.

Ms. Mayfield suggested tabling this property until the October Certification, which would provide Ms. Guzman ample time to go through the zoning process and submit a permit application to Building/Trades.

Ms. Guzman expressed the belief that she will not be through the zoning process by October.

Ms. Mayfield stated that if Ms. Guzman complies with the zoning timelines, she can easily be before the Zoning Hearing Board and have a decision by August/September.

Public Comment

There was no public comment for this property.

Mr. Keith moved, seconded by Mr. Rye, to table 645 N 9th St. until the October Certification and ordering the reduction of all delinquencies. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Kelleher stated that the next work session is scheduled for July 24th and the Determination is scheduled for August 1st.

Ms. Woodward moved, seconded by Mr. McMahon, to adjourn the hearing.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, Secretary