

**City of Salem Massachusetts
Public Meeting Minutes**

Board or Committee: Redevelopment Authority, Regular Meeting
Date and Time: Wednesday, December 13, 2023, at 5:00 pm
Meeting Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting
SRA Members Present: Cynthia Nina-Soto, Christine Madore, Chair Grace Napolitano
SRA Members Absent: Dean Rubin, Christopher Dunn
Others Present: Tom Daniel – Director of Planning and Community Development
Kate Newhall-Smith – Principal Planner
Recorder: Colleen Brewster

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Daniel stated:

1. **Crescent Lot:** They met with WinnDevelopment, who was awarded \$200,000 in home funding by the Northshore Consortium, in addition to the \$100,000 received last year. WinnDevelopment is working with engineering on the remnant parcel regarding a waterline that may or may not be functional, and that will most likely be determined in January or February. The city closed on the parcel after the November meeting. WinnDevelopment will be notified in the next couple of weeks regarding whether they received low-income tax credits.
2. **Courthouses:** WinnDevelopment is working on two tracks and their new perspective tenant will have another tour in January. The second track is a mixture of uses in the Superior Court building and housing in the County Commissions building. The first concept would have no housing, it would all be non-residential uses. Both tracks are being pursued. They are also working on historic tax credit applications, and they will work with DCAMM to inspect the flooring below any carpeting.
3. **Downtown Holiday Activities:** Mr. Daniel encourages everyone to attend the holiday festivities downtown; the Frozen Fire Festival is returning to Charolette Forten Park after Christmas.
4. **Charolette Forten Park:** The city received responses to the RFP activation and hope to select someone before the January SRA meeting. Ms. Madore asked if the SRA will have a role in the procurement process and if the SRA can be informed of the responses prior to finalizing the selection. Mr. Daniel replied no, as a city procurement project the city will make that determination, although he will confirm with the Purchasing Department regarding what information can be shared. He noted that The Anthem Group was the only response received.
5. **MBTA Communities Law:** Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll was in Salem yesterday for a press conference at BRIX to announce that Lexington and Salem were selected as the first two communities in the state in compliance with the law related to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. Lexington went above and beyond by changing zoning regulations that reflect the values of the community. Ms. Madore noted that Salem was the only one in the state that didn't require zoning changes to become eligible. Mr. Daniel

replied that that reflects well on Salem and its vibrancy because Salem is on a different scale than other towns and communities.

Design Review Board Membership

1. **Resignations:** J. Micheal Sullivan and Glenn Kennedy

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that both long-time board members submitted their resignations in the past few weeks.

2. **2. Appointee for Consideration:** Elizabeth Murray

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that Marc Perras and Sarah Tarbet recommended Elizabeth Murray. Ms. Murray stated that she has a lot of experience with buildings, traveling, and cultures through her jobs. Working in Salem has been a gift, and she wants to share her talents and experience regarding building and design. She previously shared some project related materials and had a discussion with Ms. Newhall-Smith regarding what material builders and developers are using these days, how architecture is starting to turn and become more modern, but it's important to have that dichotomy while also maintaining the architectural traditions in Salem. Chair Napolitano thanked her for her willingness to serve on the Design Review Board (DRB.)

VOTE: Madore made a motion to confirm the appointment of Elizabeth Murray. Nina-Soto seconded the motion. Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, and Napolitano. 3-0 in favor.

Ms. Newhall-Smith noted that Ms. Murray will be taking over J. Michael Sullivan's term which he has vacated, so Ms. Murry's board seat will expire on June 11, 2025.

Ms. Madore stated that she and the SRA were deeply appreciative of Glenn Kennedy and J. Michael Sullivan's service on the DRB.

3. **Reappointments:** Marc Perras and Sarah Tarbet

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that both existing members, Mr. Perras and Ms. Tarbet, have indicated their interest in continuing to serve on the DRB, which have been 3-year appointments which could be adjusted. Ms. Madore asked if there was any information in the charter regarding term length. Ms. Newhall-Smith replied that there is no policy or verbiage in the Urban Renewal Plan about term length. The Board agreed to maintain the 3-year appointment.

Mr. Perras stated that he's enjoyed his time on the DRB and is looking forward to continuing to help to shape Salem. Ms. Tarbet noted that while her term has been short, as she was filling in for someone who vacated their seat, she is also happy to continue to help shape Salem.

VOTE: Madore made a motion to confirm the reappointments of March Perras and Sarah Tarbet to the DRB for 3-years. Nina-Soto seconded the motion. Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, and Napolitano. 3-0 in favor.

Projects in the Urban Renewal Area

1. Landscape Median, Church Street – Benjamin Pierce Memorial Project: Eagle Scout project proposal to relocate and refurbish the Benjamin Pierce Memorial

Kim Emerling and Colin Bowker (Eagle Scout Candidate) were present to discuss the project.

Mr. Bowker stated that as a life-long resident of Salem, he's been a member of Salem Troop 24 for 7 years. He's participated in many community service projects such as park clean-ups and the construction of the police station memorial and has risen in the ranks with the hopes of obtaining eagle scout. To complete his eagle scout project, he wants to create a memorial for two Salem veterans from the Revolutionary War, which was approved by his scout troop leader and the Salem Veterans Council. He is seeking SRA approval to relocate the existing Benjamin Pierce memorial from the rotary of Church and St. Peter's Streets to the more visible and city owned center island next to the pathway that bisects the rotary. The current memorial is 20-inches x 38-inches and between 10 and 14-inches off the ground, resting on a granite base. The new memorial would have both the current plaque on the right and a new plaque on the left, to be placed vertically rather than horizontally for better visibility, and to continue honoring Salem veterans.

Ms. Nina-Soto asked why two plaques were proposed. Mr. Bowker replied that one plaque is for Benjamin Pierce and the other for Major General Stephen Abbot who was attached to General Washington's headquarters. Ms. Nina-Soto asked if there were any plans for the current location or will the current plaque just be removed. Mr. Bowker replied no, either the DPW or a private construction company will be asked to remove the granite.

Ms. Madore requested more information about the two individuals. Mr. Bowker noted that before the Revolutionary War, Stephen Abbot was a successful merchant in Salem, who later became a captain to General Washington's scouts during the war, and he rose in rank to Major General after the war. Benjamin Pierce was the only soldier to die during Leslie's Retreat but little else is known about him. Ms. Madore asked if there stars at bottom of plaque had a meaning. Mr. Bowker replied that they are decorative concept, and it is unknown whether they will be included. Ms. Madore asked if the inscriptions would remain. Mr. Bowker replied that the one on the right is new and the original one to the left will be cleaned.

Ms. Madore asked if there will be a rededication ceremony that is thoughtful and meaningful. Mr. Emerling replied that whether the bottom row of stars will be added will be the only change. He added that Major General Abbot was heavily involved in the Second Corps of Cadets. They plan to dedicate it with the first muster in April 2024, first at this corner, then Armory Park, and then Salem Common, which will be a substantial event. Ms. Madore was happy to see the more prominent location proposed and a rededication ceremony being planned.

Mr. Bowker read the text on the old plaque. Mr. Emerling noted that the new plaque speaks to him being a Salem merchant and a scout captain for General Washington.

Public Comment:

No one in the assembly wished to speak.

VOTE: Madore made a motion to approve. Seconded by: Nina-Soto.
Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, and Napolitano. 3-0 in favor.

Tom Daniel joined the meeting.

2. **20 Central Street Sidewalk** – Small Project Review: Removal of existing Comcast cabinet and replacement with new, larger cabinet

Darren Young of Comcast was present to discuss the project.

Mr. Young stated that 24 years ago he installed the existing power supply cabinet at the corner of Front and Central Streets. They are upgrading the broadband system “The Genesis Project” due to the number of people now working from home since COVID-19. The new amplifier is larger and would stop just past the existing cabinet wall. It would be placed on a new concrete pad, leaving 37-inches of clearance at the sidewalk. Turning the cabinet would mean taking up even more of the sidewalk, requiring a new pad, and a disconnection by National Grid. They want to reuse the existing meter, disconnect it at the bottom, remove the existing cabinet, and place a new cabinet overtop. If this is not possible, the new amplifier would need to be relocated toward the center of the intersection, causing traffic delays, the need to cage off the area, and use a police detail each time the need to access the cabinet. A new cabinet in the existing location keeps them out of the road and it should take half a day to complete the work. An underground contractor, who will extend the pad, would need approximately half a day, to complete their work.

Ms. Nina-Soto asked how much space would remain. Mr. Young replied 1-inch leaving 37-inches clear, and 36-inches meets HC code. Ms. Nina-Soto raised concerns with the city trying to get people off the streets and to use the sidewalks, which become even narrower during the winter. She asked if it could be turned sideways. Mr. Young replied that more work involved, National Grid would need to dig up the area and extend the pipe 18-inches. Ms. Nina-Soto asked if the cabinet would need to increase in size again. Mr. Young replied if that were to happen, they would find a new location. Ms. Nina-Soto reiterated her concerns with pedestrian safety along the sidewalk.

Ms. Madore supported Ms. Nina-Soto’s concerns of convenience being the long-term expense of pedestrians with mobility concerns. She mentioned the utility box placed in front of Old Town Hall that needed to be relocated because it was an eye sore, noting that they can’t predict the future, but small projects can have future issues. She asked if other locations had been considered. Mr. Young replied that there is no other location available and noted that new ones would require more digging in the street, but they want to stop adding infrastructure under the street. A separate location would require a power source and the current location would be a 5-inch extension that eliminates disruption to the street. Mr. Madore noted that the Board serves the interest of the public and she hoped for a more thoughtful process. Ms. Nina-Soto questioned why they were not thinking pedestrian friendly first, reiterating her concerns with the flow of pedestrian traffic, and the consideration of the alternatives, such as turning it on its side.

Chair Napolitano asked why a larger cabinet was needed. Mr. Young replied because of the need for a larger amplifier for an increase in service; the larger equipment needs a larger cabinet; this upgrade is consistent with the City-wide Genesis upgrade in the city. Chair Napolitano asked what would happen if it were not upgraded. Mr. Young replied that the residents in this area of the city won’t get the increased bandwidth. Chair Napolitano requested a timeframe to complete

the work. Mr. Young replied a new location would require a 1-day outage. This proposal requires a 4 hour outage, but with the short outage he can suspend the amplifier and power it with a generator while the work is being done; he can't do that with an 8-hour outage because it requires the replacement of the concrete pan, cables, slot, etc. All pipes routed in would not line up if the cabinet was turned. The meter is the biggest concern.

Ms. Madore suggested that as a downtown resident she could live through an 8-hour outage, nothing that is a small price to pay to recoup more sidewalk space. Mr. Young reiterated that they won't gain any more space, the existing cabinet is 32-inches x 32-inches and the new will be 32-inches x 38-inches, which will further reduce the amount of clear space. While he understood the SRA's desire to maintain sidewalk clearance, turning the cabinet will make this a small cabinet an even more complicated project. The pad extension would be 5-inches with the new cabinet is 6-inches wider. He noted that the height of pad is approximately 1-1/2-inches above the existing sidewalk and cobblestones with rounded edges could be used.

Chair Napolitano suggested referring the matter to the DRB for additional review.

Public Comment:

No one in the assembly wished to speak.

VOTE: Madore made a motion to approve. Seconded by: Nina-Soto.

Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto – not in favor, Napolitano. 2-1 (Nina-Soto) in favor.

New / Old Business

Redevelopment of the Historic Courthouses and the Crescent Lot: Update on Project Status

Mr. Daniel reviewed the information as stated in the Executive Director's report earlier in the meeting.

SRA Financials: Received.

Approval of Minutes

1. Review of November 8, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes

VOTE: Nina-Soto made a motion to approve the November 8, 2023, minutes. Seconded by: Madore.

Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, Napolitano. 3-0 in favor.

Other

Adjournment

VOTE: Nina-Soto made a motion to adjourn the regular meeting. Seconded by: Madore.

Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, Napolitano. 3-0 in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00PM.

Know your rights under the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. c. 39 §23B and City Ordinance Sections 2-028
through 2-2033