

**City of Salem Massachusetts
Public Meeting Minutes**

Board or Committee:	Redevelopment Authority, Regular Meeting
Date and Time:	Wednesday, September 13, 2023, at 6:00 pm
Meeting Location:	Virtual Zoom Meeting
SRA Members Present:	Acting-Chair Dean Rubin, Cynthia Nina-Soto, Christine Madore, Chair Grace Napolitano
SRA Members Absent:	None
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. The Charlotte Forten RFP was not awarded, and a revised draft will go out this fall seeking someone to manage the programming. The shade structure design is advancing and will come before the SRA. Acting-Chair Rubin added that the committee is moving forward and has a meeting tomorrow, September 14, 2023. The team will look at finalist proposals, a hybrid meeting is scheduled next week with short presentations by the 4 finalists with a Q&A. The community can vote as well, and by next summer the sculpture of Charlotte Forten will be installed. The proposals will be reviewed, and input provided before their final submissions. Ms. Newhall-Smith noted that the RFP for programming may be released in November, and they will likely know where the statue will be located. They are working on the electrical capacity, which is low for a full-time operator, and Julie Barry is working with the Electrical Department to improve the electrical capacity within the park. Acting-Chair Rubin noted that the statue(s) location could affect programming.
2. The tourism season continues to ramp up and businesses are doing well.

City Initiatives

1. **Downtown Renewal Area:** Downtown Bicycle Parking – Deployment of additional parking meter bicycle racks

Kate Newhall-Smith was present to discuss the project.

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that the proposal is to add more racks around the city but mainly in the downtown area. Tom Devine provided a letter regarding the 20 racks that are in place and the desire to deploy 15-20 more racks this fall. The proposed racks would be cast iron and steel painted black and attached to parking meters, to minimize visual impact.

Ms. Madore asked if only this type of rack is proposed and rather than more traditional separate racks, noting that her style of bike would not fit the proposed rack. She noted that 20 racks attached to parking meters would only hold 1 bike each and freestanding racks are more

accessible for larger bikes. She noted that parking meter kiosks may be proposed and asked what will happen to the proposed racks when the meter poles are eliminated.

Acting-Chair Rubin presented a photo of a freestanding bike rack outside his home and asked if different types of structures would be proposed and agreed with Ms. Madore's concerns regarding what happens with the meters going away. He noted that the proposed racks are unsightly, and those parking would need to maneuver around a bike mounted to the rack to pay the meter. Ms. Madore suggested the rack placement would encourage riders to ride on the sidewalk where they would interact with pedestrians and suggested installing a row of racks like the one behind city hall or more decorative options.

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that she does not know the process that led to this style of rack being chosen and is not sure if there are plans to provide multi-bike racks in other downtown locations.

Mr. Daniel had no additional information to provide but noted that this proposal would provide more opportunities and availability. The Bike Committee is staffed by Tom Devine and feedback can be provided.

Acting-Chair Rubin noted the ease of quickly installing the proposed racks vs. installing larger racks, and suggested the SRA provide feedback to Tom Devine. Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that she will request more information on their overall bike rack plan.

Ms. Nina-Soto stated that this is a missed opportunity to install more picturesque bike racks like other cities, that can be both beautiful and purposeful, a sculpture-like structure.

Funding Request

1. 289 Derby Street: Request from The Anthem Group for a \$15,000 grant to support the Frozen Fire Festival

Shelby Elwell of The Anthem Group was present to discuss the project.

Acting-Chair Mr. Rubin stated that the request is for more than \$5,000 which exceeds the Executive Director's authority to administratively review and approve the request.

Ms. Elwell stated that The Anthem Group did the same festival in 2022, and their focus was on live entertainment, tourism, placemaking, etc. The first Fire Festival 2022 festive was hosted from December 26th through January 1st and included numerous vendors, activities, live music, fire performers, fire pits, igloos, etc. They want to amplify and augment elements this year. 1) Allocating the funding by enhancing the entertainment and using local and international entertainers for all 7 days. 2) Supporting the artisan market by and providing spaces for smaller businesses that cannot afford the vendor fee. 3) Increased youth focus programming during the day for an all-ages experience with workshops and exhibitions. 4) Community art installations that could be permanent or semi-permanent. 5) Sustainability initiatives through recycling, eco-friendly for food and drink.

Ms. Madore asked city staff if grants under \$5,000 were awarded by the SRA in the last 3-years. Ms. Newhall-Smith replied that small grants were provided to Main Streets for Arts Festival in 2021, to Creative Collective for Art Fest in 2022, to Shakespeare in the Park in 2022, and to

Frozen Fire in 2022. Ms. Madore stated that The Anthem Group's proposal made her think about the Anti-Aid amendment from the MA Constitution, which prevents the use of public funding for private or religious entities without the exchange of public benefit. Acting-Chair Rubin replied that the event is encouraging the public to interact for a social event and lift the spirit of the city. Ms. Madore asked if an explanation was included in the agreement for what the benefit of the funds would be. Ms. Newhall-Smith replied that the SRA funds aren't public funding, but redevelopment authority funds, the award letters do say what the funds are to be used for, and the fund name includes the term "for public programming" in the park, so this may not be in violation. Mr. Daniel agreed. Ms. Madore noted that she didn't want it to be challenged and for the SRA and city to cover their bases.

Ms. Madore asked if the event included a ticketed entry or was free. Ms. Elwell replied that the event was free and open to the public.

Ms. Madore was happy to support the proposal and the grant, and suggested the desire for sustainability could be more specific and include shuttle rides to reduce vehicular traffic.

Ms. Nina-Soto was in favor of the proposal but raised concerns with potential for conflict if Anthem does art installations and the forthcoming RFP for the park and permanent / semi-permanent art installations. Mr. Daniel noted that permanent items would require review by the SRA and PAC, while semi-permanent/temporary items could enhance the park for the season. The city needs to know what that is so other incumbrances aren't created. Ms. Nina-Soto requested the budget for this item. Ms. Elwell replied that \$2,000 to be used for a new Salem sign or a temporary mural that could be stored and reinstalled elsewhere or the following year.

Grace Napolitano arrived.

Acting-Chair Rubin requested the 2022 total budget. Ms. Elwell replied approximately \$130,000 and attributed the sizeable increase to costs the previous year that they didn't anticipate, such as last-minute generator purchases. Acting-Chair Rubin noted that the request for funding is a large sum of money that is spent to maximize the event and the funds should be used to meet their vision rather than have each category tied to a specific dollar amount. Ms. Newhall-Smith noted that she requested the breakdown of funding. Ms. Nina-Soto agreed with Acting-Chair Rubin's suggestion, her concern was item temporary or semi-permanent items, and conflicts with the RFP, but she was happy to see their goals for the event. Ms. Madore stated that she sees both sides, she was glad that the event was thought through, and agreed with Acting-Chair Rubin's suggestion.

VOTE: Nina-Soto made a motion to approve the \$15,000 grant as requested. Seconded by: Madore.

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

Projects in the Urban Renewal Area

There are no projects to review.

New / Old Business

1. Community Preservation Plan – Request for Comment

Acting-Chair Rubin reiterated his request from the previous year, to highlight the changes – what was being deleted or added, rather than asking the public to read a 95-page document. Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that she will request a redline document from Patti Kelleher and noted that SRA comments are due back by October 2nd.

Ms. Madore stated that the document was a status report and not a plan, and she had no comments or questions, the CPC should have more pointed questions for the SRA to answer and noted that the document included old information that is no longer current. She noted her interest in the revenues from real estate transactions and her noticing that housing was awarded as under 20%, which she questioned but added that input can be provided during the funding process. She agreed with including highlights and/or differences as suggested by Acting-Chair Rubin.

2. Motion for Tom Daniel, as Executive Director of the Salem Redevelopment Authority (SRA), should have the authority to enter into and execute any documents in connection with 1) the granting of or receiving of any easements bind between the SRA and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and 2) the acquisition of land currently owned by the MBTA containing approximately 5,554 square-feet of land and shown on the A&R plan as Parcel C, including but not limited to and Purchase and Sale Agreement and any other documents he determines is in his interest is necessary for the execution of the transaction described herein.

Mr. Daniel noted they are still close to closing, the MBTA wanted another SRA vote granting specific for this particular transaction of the easement. The earlier easements were not recorded and only the dates have changed. Mr. Rubin asked if the City Solicitor needs to review it. Mr. Daniel replied that she has.

VOTE: Madore made a motion for Tom Daniel, as Executive Director of the Salem Redevelopment Authority (SRA), has the authority to enter into and execute any documents in connection with 1) the granting of or receiving of any easements bind between the SRA and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and 2) the acquisition of land currently owned by the MBTA containing approximately 5,554 square-feet of land and shown on the A&R plan as Parcel C, including but not limited to and Purchase and Sale Agreement and any other documents he determines is in his interest is necessary for the execution of the transaction described herein. Seconded by: Nina-Soto.

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

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

Mr. Daniel stated that WinnDevelopment is moving forward with an application for low-income housing credits, and they requested a letter of support from the SRA for either he or Chair Napolitano to execute. Winn is aware that the crescent lot may not proceed prior to the courthouses.

The window survey at the courthouses is necessary for the historic tax credit application soon, and they are working with MassDevelopment on their \$600,000 grant award. He noted that the principal and CEO of USG, Lance Robbins, passed away in late August. Their CFO is still interested in continuing with the project because Mr. Robbins wanted to see this project continue. SRA staff met with Winn today and Winn is meeting with the USG team on Friday to see where

they are in their due diligence. The feedback they've received has been very beneficial and they want to ensure that they can proceed.

Acting-Chair Rubin requested their worst-case scenario, such as them backing out. Mr. Daniel replied that USG was introduced to the SRA and Matt Zahler reviewed their financial statements, the next step would be a formal amendment to include them. If neither wanted to, the partnership would not move forward, and nothing would change contractually. Winn would need to find a new partner. USG could continue with a modified approach, but Winn is responsible for the courthouses, which continues to be the focus of this project.

Acting-Chair Rubin noted that he was getting lost in all the financing associated with the project and requested a separate meeting with Mr. Daniel for clarification.

SRA Financials:

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that the city's Finance Director has returned from sabbatical. She will continue to work with the Finance Director on crafting a sound financial policy for the SRA to review soon.

Other:

Approval of Minutes

1. Review of August 9, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes

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

Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, Rubin, Napolitano. 4-0 in favor.

2. Review of August 9, 2023, Executive Session to approve the Executive Session Minutes

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

Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, Rubin, Napolitano. 4-0 in favor.

Other

Adjournment

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

Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, Rubin, Napolitano. 4-0 in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 7:10PM.

Annual Meeting

Roll Call

SRA Members Present:	Acting-Chair Dean Rubin, Cynthia Nina-Soto, Christine Madore, Chair Grace Napolitano
SRA Members Absent:	None
Others Present:	Tom Daniel – Director of Planning and Community Development; Kate Newhall-Smith, Principal Planner
Recorder:	Colleen Brewster

Annual Financial Report:

Mr. Daniel noted the following 2023 Goals:

1. Ongoing plan for the North downtown vision planning, a continuation of the 2018 workshop. The key pieces are the courthouses and crescent lot. The permitting for the courthouses
2. Relationship building which included a meeting with the Affordable Housing Trust, a joint meeting with the Salem City Council, he and Ms. Newhall-Smith continue to meet with the City Economic Development Partners (Salem Chamber, The Partnership, Creative Collection, Destination Salem, The Enterprise Center, and Salem Main Streets.) While there were no joint meetings with the Salem City Council, there were on-boarding sessions with new City Councillors to bring them up to speed on the SRA and projects the SRA is working on.
3. The internal systems update included an update by Chair Napolitano, Mr. Rubin, and Ms. Newhall-Smith, where the by-laws were updated. Ms. Newhall-Smith is currently working an update to the financial system with Salem's Finance Office who has returned from leave.

Mr. Daniel proposed the following goal topics for 2024:

1. The courthouse project will be the bulk of the work and they are working with Traffic and Parking on the downtown parking study, both are related to the northern end of downtown visioning plan, to activate these underutilized spaces.
2. Relationships and Communications: Ms. Newhall-Smith previously stated that this goal is done daily and is no longer a goal. The internal systems update will become goal number 2, with a focus on the financial systems.
3. Charolette Forten Park: It is discussed at many SRA meetings, there are on-going efforts by many groups to provide activation and improvements, such as the shade structure and the addition of a memorial.

Mr. Daniel added that the SRA is either leading or actively participating in all of these goals.

Executive Directors Report:

Mr. Daniel stated that the SRA has a license agreement with Turner's Sea Food and East Regiment Beer Company for their outdoor areas, and their payments are being tracked by Ms. Newhall-Smith.

Projects:

Mr. Daniel stated that private section projects are the bulk of what the SRA reviews, such as:

1. Jerry's Army Navy where the SRA evaluated the conceptual design, the developer worked through a couple iterations and the SRA determined that it would not be an appropriate project to proceed with.
2. 73 Lafayette Street (Northshore Health Center) and Peabody Street Park: Significant time and care when into the potential demolition of the existing structure demonstrating stewardship for a historic downtown asset. The SRA is looking to have a robust peer review proposal to see how feasible it would or would not be to maintain the structure.
3. 23 Summer Street: While it is a small project, it would be a significant change at the intersection with various modification and the SRA took their time evaluating it, such as the

slate vs. architectural shingles, which is important to the character of the downtown and that thoughtful alternatives are considered and eliminated after careful analysis.

Signage:

1. Both existing and new businesses updated their signage, indicating more business activity downtown either through re-investing or new owners coming to the city.

Outdoor Dining:

1. Outdoor dining permits were suspended, and they are still working with the flexibility that the Commonwealth has granted. Ms. Newhall-Smith has been working with other city partners on the procedures for 2024.

Building Projects and Facades:

1. The cell phone towers on Charter Street, businesses improving their exterior facades, roof repairs, etc.
2. While the DRB was an entity created for the SRA, it provides support to the Planning Board, entrance corridors, the North River Canal Corridor, and municipal and religious reuse projects, all of which are reviewed by Ms. Newhall-Smith.

Public Projects and Initiatives:

1. Downtown parking study with Traffic and Parking
2. Destination Salem has led the updating of the Heritage Trail with the restriping of the red line throughout the downtown to gold, and with new interpretations via an app.
3. Working with Julie Barry on an improvement plan for Old Town Hall, which involved analysis for utilization and the hopes of the community.

Arts and Culture Program:

1. There is programming across the city with a focus on programming downtown.
2. Julie Barry also works on programming for Old Town Hall, Derby Square, and manages Artists' Row. The Artists' Row tenants are paying below market rate rent, giving them a chance to perform their craft while selling their items, and there are several instances where tenants graduate to brick-and-mortar stores. The public artists in residence will continue this year.
3. The Charolette Forten Park memorial and shade structure efforts continue as well as programming.

Business Support and Economic Development:

1. Salem Main Streets and the North Shore CDC both provide technical support for existing and new businesses, and host programming throughout the year to support the business community.
2. To support businesses, the city has a loan program managed by Ms. Newhall-Smith.
3. The SRA supports and collaborates with the Salem Loan Fund, which was established during the pandemic with private bank funding. Loans closed on in 2023 were with Couch Dog Brewing Company and The Daily Table.

Board Membership:

1. There have been no changes to the SRA Board membership.
2. Helen Sides, a long-standing member of the DRB resigned in 2023 but continues to be a Planning Board member.
3. Sarah Tarbet, who serves on the Planning Board, joined the DRB. It is great to have that connection between those two boards, since nearly every project that comes before the SRA also goes before the Planning Board.

Financial Accounts:

1. Main Account: Received development funding from WinnDevelopment which is used to pay for the legal and development consulting services.
2. Charolette Forten Park Programming Fund: Those funds are used exclusively for investments and supporting public performances at the park.

Q&A:

Mr. Rubin complimented Ms. Newhall-Smith and Mr. Daniel for their excellent stewardship for the past year, given the amount of effort and time it takes to do so, which keeps the SRA on track. Regarding the activation of goals, he noted that there are still many empty buildings downtown, particularly at the first floor of BRIX, which is a big part of the north sector. He asked if the SRA could assist to help stimulate the use of such empty spaces or reaching out to Salem Main Streets or the Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Madore noted the excessively high rent cost.

Mr. Daniel agreed that the economics at BRIX is the concern although there have been many prospects. Ms. Newhall-Smith meets regularly with the Chamber and Salem Main Streets regarding recruitment, and the overall vacancy is very low in Salem. There is some turnover, although that transition can take time. The higher demand allows owners to charge more for the space making it harder for the businesses. There has been a shift to tourist-oriented businesses that have replaced some year-round uses. There are on-going recruitment efforts but it's the market that dictates who shows up.

Ms. Newhall-Smith agreed that the vacancy is low and there are several highly visible locations with long-time vacancies. The Holyoke Building has vacant space, but it not highly visible. The rents are extraordinary and there is not a lot of turnovers. Often there are tenants ready to take over a lease before it is on the open market. Her monthly meeting regarding recruitment focuses on finding businesses that will round out the options downtown and serve year-round residents rather than a tourism attraction. Many entrepreneurs are opening their first storefront and are seeking the capital to make such high lease payments. There are a lot of challenges and BRIX has a great location, but it is a large empty space with high costs for build-out. She believes that BRIX represents a good lesson for the SRA when reviewing mixed-use projects. The SRA needs to be intentional when asking about the commercial spaces to ensure they meet the needs of the business community.

Mr. Rubin noted that he would hate to see the same occur with the retail space proposed at the crescent lot, and perhaps the intentionality needs to be highlighted to make build-outs easier and rents that aren't ridiculous. Ms. Newhall-Smith suggested creating spaces with appropriate square footage.

Ms. Madore noted that her lesson learned from BRIX is that when reviewing development projects of this size, that they require documentation of due diligence for the commercial space to show that the developer searched for potential tenants, through letters of interest or good-faith deposits noting that the developer would build out the space for the tenant. If the lease does not work out, then the SRA will know that the space has been built-out for retail use with all of the components that go along with such a space. Mr. Rubin noted that letters from potential tenants were provided by WinnDevelopment for the courthouse and there should be some thought on how to operate differently and achieve the goal of activation next year.

Ms. Madore stated that another missed opportunity was 30 Federal Street by Mike Becker. She personally tried to help him find tenants to make the overall project more appealing to the neighborhood, and it's a project which may not happen at this point. The SRA should be more formal in requiring applicants to have a more thoughtful process. Jerry's Department Store, also a Mike Becker project, was another opportunity where questions could have been asked by the SRA, although they already had a tenant. Mr. Daniel noted the questions related to Jerry's that the early iterations had odd commercial space layouts, access, and peculiar alignments, so the design team rationalized that and the impact on the ceiling height. The SRA did ensure that a more standardly functional commercial space would be created. Ms. Madore noted that the viability of that commercial space is important.

Ms. Madore requested clarification on the lease agreement or conveyance for the strip of land along the edge of Charlette Forten Park and an update. Mr. Daniel replied that there is an easement between the owner of 285 Derby and the SRA, where a concrete walkway was constructed. Ms. Madore questioned whether there was a licensing opportunity to explore like at East Regiment Beer Company and Turner's Seafood. Mr. Daniel replied no, the Charolette Forten Programming Fund was the payment for that easement. Ms. Madore questioned the potential for other licensing opportunities for the SRA to consider. Mr. Daniel replied that there are some properties being use for seasonal outdoor dining without permanent infrastructure being utilized through the café permit process.

Mr. Rubin questioned the preamble of the bylaws because it speaks to using eminent domain, which made him think of the Witch City Mall, which gets worse each season. He wondered whether the SRA could use their authority to push it along despite the owner having no interest in selling the property and others say there is nothing that can be done, because the preamble mentions "to eliminate and redevelop substandard, decadent, or blighted open areas..." The Board agreed that funds and a lawyer would be required and a legal opinion on the criteria that needs to be met to proceed. Mr. Rubin wondered what pressure can be put on the owner in terms of activation to upgrade it, to make it more welcoming and leave a good impression for visitors. Chair Napolitano replied that the preamble cannot be used to push the mall owner unless the SRA took legal action.

Mr. Rubin complimented Old Town Hall for having 334 events and suggested the SRA help promote them. Mr. Daniel replied that those events are supported by Julie Barry and others, and the capital and infrastructure planning goal for the building was to allow for programming at the basement, first and second floors at the same time, which it cannot currently do, and to make the building a community hub with a special focus on arts and culture. Mr. Rubin asked if the downtown

neighborhood association meeting held at Old Town Hall the previous week is considered an event. Mr. Daniel replied yes, all public use of the building counts as an event.

Mr. Rubin noted that in terms of funds, he read an article in the Wall Street Journal regarding how New York City is looking into an equitable way to tax the outdoor dining space for restaurants, since they are extending into the public space, and the public is paying the incremental real estate tax on that space rather than the restaurant owners, if that space became permanent. It may not be within the purview of the SRA, but it could be considered. Mr. Daniel replied that Ms. Newhall-Smith is working on a process with the City Solicitor for ways to collect fees. Mr. Rubin noted that it would be an aggressive way to collect funds for those restaurants that have extended their footprint, rather than a \$100 fee, and it would see who really wants an outdoor café if they must pay for it. Outdoor dining often comes at the expense of parking spaces.

VOTE: Rubin made a motion to approve the goals as recommended. Seconded by: Nina-Soto.
Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, Rubin, Napolitano. 4-0 in favor.

1. Election of Officers: Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer

Mr. Daniel stated that the current slate of officers has stated that they will continue to serve in those roles.

VOTE: Rubin made a motion to approve the current slate of officers, Grace Napolitano as Chair, Dean Rubin as Vice-Chair, and Christine Madore as Treasurer. Seconded by: Nina-Soto.
Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, Rubin, Napolitano. 4-0 in favor.

Mr. Daniel stated that there have been a few prospects for potential new SRA members, whose interest related more to the Planning Board. He hoped to have a recommendation prior to the next SRA meeting, although they may not be approved by the City Council given their cycles.

Other

Adjournment

VOTE: Rubin made a motion to adjourn the annual meeting. Seconded by: Nina-Soto.
Roll Call: Madore, Nina-Soto, Rubin, Napolitano. 4-0 in favor.

The annual meeting adjourned at 8:00PM.

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