



City of Milwaukee

200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
53202

Meeting Minutes

BRONZEVILLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

LASHAWNDR A VERNON, CHAIR

Raynetta Hill, Vice-Chair

**Theresa Garrison, Anthony Smith, Baboonie Tatum, Rayhainio
Boynes, Terrence Moore, Sr.**

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Monday, March 17, 2025

9:00 AM

Virtual Meeting

This will be a virtual meeting conducted via GoToMeeting. Should you wish to join this meeting from your phone, tablet, or computer you may go to <https://meet.goto.com/818077645>. You can also dial in using your phone United States: +1 (646) 749-3122 and Access Code: 818-077-645.

1. Call to order.

Meeting called to order at 9:04 a.m.

2. Roll call.

Present 5 - Garrison, Vernon, Boynes, Smith and Tatum

Excused 1 - Hill

3. Review and approval of the previous meeting minutes from January 13, 2025.

Meeting minutes from January 13, 2025 were approved without objection.

4. Bronzeville RFPs, listings, projects, programs, initiatives, events, grants, activities, plans, or other aspects for update, discussion, presentation, review, motion, recommendation, and/or approval.

a. DCD Real Estate disposition strategy for City-owned residential developable lots in Harambee and Bronzeville.

Appearing:

Tess Wynn, DCD Real Estate

Beth Van Gorp, Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity

Teig Whaley-Smith, Community Development Alliance (CDA)

Ms. Wynn said that the committee wanted to continue the discussion from its last

meeting to get more information on the plans and lots on hold for Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity and CDA.

Ms. Van Gorp gave a presentation. Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity has a strategic plan to double their new homes (40) and critical home repairs (80-100) by 2028. They provide affordable home repair services for existing homeowners up to 80% project costs covered and free lead remediation. In Harambee, they have done a total of 15 critical home repairs and 13 whole house lead abatement thus far since 2021. They provide affordable homeownership for first-time homebuyers with little to no down payment and an average of \$950 or less monthly mortgage payment. Their 2025 build plan goals include 34 new houses. 15 of those to be in Harambee with 10 3-bedroom houses and 5 4-bedroom houses. Houses would be scattered but close to each other in Harambee. Blocks of interest include 2900 block of N. 6th, 7th, Dr. William Finlayson Streets; 3200 block of N. Achilles, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Streets, and 3200-3300 block of N. Buffum. Harambee target home start goals include 15 homes in 2027 and 8 homes in 2028. Building locations to be in Harambee, King Park/Midtown, Milwaukee north and west side neighborhoods, and new locations. Their 2024 home sales included 11 homes sold in Harambee and 8 homes sold in other neighborhoods. Median sale price were \$175,000 for Harambee and \$156,500 for other neighborhoods. 56 families were actively in the program. They were celebrating 40 years of homeownership and neighborhood stabilization. They were applying for a Property Tax Fellow to do more research. Available and beneficial to everyone was a NALCAP Guide to Equitable Neighborhood Development.

Mr. Whaley-Smith gave an presentation. CDA was a collective housing action group focused on creating systems like an acquisition fund to purchase homes away from landlords and flip them back to homeownership. Their Harambee Neighborhood Change Over Time Report from 2012 to 2022 showed a decrease in total population from 21,325 to 18,336, decrease in total housing units by about 500 units, decrease in the % of Black families from 78.4% to 71.5%, decrease of those living in poverty from 10,122 to 6,203 (possible sign of both abandonment and displacement), increase of those driving to work by nearly 30%, and decrease of those using public transportation by nearly 50%. The strategy to stop the hemorrhaging of families and homeownership is to create new inventory.

CDA has about 2,000 families in their homebuyer counseling process annually. Only about 600 of those families receive inventory and loans. They try to help the remaining 1,400 people get off the bench by providing more inventory and additional credit to purchase homes. They have 132 aspiring homeowners in Harambee. Only 29 have been able to purchase homes, almost entirely related to new construction. There has been an increase in homeownership in Harambee by about 15 homeowners per year. There is lack of regulation because of State involvement. City Council leaders have passed legislation to hold landlords accountable only to be preempted by the State. CDA believes new, attainable construction for people making \$50,000 or less a year is the appropriate strategy to advance equity and homeownership. Also, new lending approaches are needed.

In Harambee the mortgage denial rate in the southern area is 9- 16%, goes up to 16-25%, and 25-50% in the northwest area. They are working with Axe Housing and other lenders to provide opportunity mortgage (lending product to people at 40% or higher debt-to-income ratio). They are also trying to implement a coordinated backbone tax incremental district from Burleigh to Keefe and Holton to 7th Street. The TID would be a spine of vacant lots and contiguous arms and leg vacant lots.

CDA homes cost \$250,000 to build. Homeowners pay about \$120,000. Philanthropy pays \$30,000, and ARPA funds pay the remaining \$100,000. With ARPA funds gone they will bring \$50,000 using a tax incremental district and \$50,000 in other funds like new market tax credits, low-income housing tax credits, and other philanthropy. Their first completed backbone TID was completed last year in the King Park/Midtown area with 20 duplexes. Also 34 single-family homes were built by Habitat.

A tax increment of the district is not a new tax. A new home in the TID would bring \$2,500 of taxes paid or about \$50,000 of present value to be invested in the home. The existing and new home both receive identical tax bills with the same tax rate with the funds from the existing home going to the City budget and the funds for the new home for the first 25 years go to support the project budget. The tax bill goes to pay off the project budget and then goes to the City budget after 25 years. The amount of increment would generate about \$2.5 to \$2.8 million with about \$.8 million going towards constructing 8 early childhood education homes with the rest going to support Habitat.

They were partnering with 5 different early childhood centers in formerly redline areas throughout the city to build homes for early childhood educators. The first homes were on the south side starting last October, and five more are in the process of closing. They would like these homes to be completed in Harambee by first quarter of next year.

Chair Vernon requested for the presentations to be forwarded to members and staff.

Ms. Wynn said that she was present to listen to additional feedback from the committee given the presentation made by Habitat and CDA.

Members inquired about rising building costs resulting in a reduction in homes being built, ability to identify out-of-state investors, and process on sale of City-owned properties.

Mr. Whaley-Smith replied. They were aware and concerned with inflating costs but their commitments would not be impacted. The State preempted City legislation requiring landlord registration. CDA was establishing a Future Homeowner Bill of Rights to discourage outside investors and give opportunity purchase by tenants. Their strategies are on their website, and their phase 1 policy would be done in the next few weeks.

Ms. Wynn replied. City-acquired lots and properties before April 2022 are able to be administratively set for owner occupancy (with aldermanic input) but not for those after April 2022, which are available to everyone. The new City ordinance to handle City-owned properties going forward was still being modified. They are able to hold their properties in the meantime. Aldermanic input is uncertain going forward.

Chair Vernon said she would like for CDA, Habitat, and the City to prioritize helping the ARCH program and artists to acquire homeownership from City-owned lots and properties, which has been challenging for that community.

Mr. Whaley-Smith and Ms. Van Gorp said they would be open to discuss homeownership for the artist community and to navigate fair housing guidelines.

b. Central City Plaza Historic District permanent historic designation between

W. Walnut St. and W. Vine St. and N. 6th St. and N. 7th St.

Appearing:

Tim Askin, Historic Preservation Commission

Chris Rute, Milwaukee Preservation Alliance (applicant)

Major Rachel Stouder, The Salvation Army Wisconsin & Upper Michigan Division

Chris Sauve, The Salvation Army (board member)

Mr. Askin gave a presentation. This permanent historic designation originated from possible demolition of one or more of the three buildings on the site. Application was made from a citizen. The Historic Preservation Commission recommended approval of the permanent historic designation. The matter was before the committee for its advisory review at the direction of Ald. Coggs prior to its review by the Common Council for formal designation.

The plaza is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of 6th and Walnut. Central City Plaza is a shopping complex of 3 buildings in the new formless style with related surface parking and some limited landscaping. The neighborhood had a distinct character of a suburban commercial corridor reflecting loosely related mid-century urban renewal developments executed under modernist architectural and planning ideals. There is deep background on neighborhood destruction from urban renewal on the north side of the City dating back to the early 1970s which resulted in a lot of low rise, vacant lots, housing loss, and surface parking. Urban neighborhood destruction occurred in the Third Ward and moved to 6th St. and Hillside area.

Central City Plaza was a part of the Roosevelt (middle school) Project to create a commercial strip, give MPS land for the middle school, and demolishing 8th Street School for the highway. Roosevelt is still the original building. RACM in 1966 proceeded with the project for proposed uses of a playground, park, and local businesses. No residential development was proposed. The development removed 100 housing units for most who were minorities and of low income. The development slowed and had difficulties.

Kenneth Coulter, owner of the Milwaukee Star (black owned weekly newspaper) ultimately successfully acquired from RACM (after several bids), via the Central City Development Corporation, the Central City Plaza site to develop three buildings consisting of an office, entertainment building, and either a motel or neighborhood theater. The goal was to have a community project to bring business and vitality back to Walnut St. for the Black community. The primary commercial center was to be the building at the corner known today as the Prince Hall Masonic building. The project was later overtaken by Felmers Chaney overtook the project and hired Alonzo Robinson, the first black architect in Wisconsin at the time, to design the project for 11 corporations for 14 tenants.

The development fell into financial trouble. The grocery store suffered and closed. Only the retail liquor store, photo studio, barbershop, and 20% of the space was still occupied by end of 1974. Construction barriers could not be overcome for the project. There was not enough density with sufficient disposable income to support and patronize the development. The Small Business Administration (SBA) took over management in 1975. By 1977 the site was completely vacant except for a couple of offices. SBA sold the complex to the City in 1979.

The three buildings today consist of today's Salvation Army Emergency Lodge (formerly Masterpiece Lodge), Pogo Liquor Store, and Prince Hall Masonic Center (formerly Mini Plaza). The center held various tenants, a restaurant, bowling alley, pharmacy, and numerous office tenants.

In summary, HPC recommended approval under 6 of their 10 criteria - f-1, f-3, f-5, f-6, f-8 and f-9. Central City Plaza remains historically significant as the first and known Black conceived, designed, owned, tenanted, and operated shopping center in Wisconsin. Despite its financial challenges, the plaza represents an important chapter in Milwaukee's African-American commerce and economic development history. The plaza was Felmer Cheney's first major real estate project. He was the first Black police sergeant, founded the Black-owned North Milwaukee State Bank, and was president of the Milwaukee NAACP. The plaza embodies new formalism architectural style popular in the 1960s and 1970s. The development was designed by the first Wisconsin Black licensed architect Alonzo Robinson, who had other works in the City. The plaza is uniquely identifiable and known as a grand, unusual complex of white modernist new formalist buildings. Historic preservation tax credits are available only if all three building remains.

Major Stouder testified. The Salvation Army was in opposition to the designation. They have owned the former lodge building for 40 years and operate an emergency shelter there. Their services include emergency housing, case management, mental health, child development, medical clinic, and respite services. They have been searching for 8 years to expand their services. They have exhausted options to relocate as there were no other area in the City suitable or open to their operations. The best option was for them to remain at the plaza and expand from there. Their current building is no longer suitable and is cost prohibitive to rehabilitate to meet their needs. Issues include lead piping, unwelcoming cinder blocks for their clients, and no outdoor play space. They purchased the liquor store building and abated the building.

The expansion plans include demolition of the lodge building (and possibly the liquor store building as an entryway) for a new 65,000 sq. ft. building. The larger facility would increase their bed count, services, and spaces. They just learned about the historic significance of the plaza and buildings last December and understood the historic significance. The current footprint of two of the plaza buildings were cost prohibitive and inadequate to meet their needs to expand and continue their operations. If the buildings were to remain as-is, they would have to reduce their services while working to improve the current buildings as-is. They would welcome a community meeting to tell more about their plans.

Members inquired about ownership of the buildings, what was being designated, applicant information, possibility to keep the buildings with greenspace, possible sale of the Cab Company building, design of the buildings, residency requirement for the applicant, and timeline of City review and approval of the designation.

Mr. Rute said that he put forth the application for permanent historic designation. He is a City resident, but not within the plaza neighborhood, is part of Milwaukee Preservation Alliance, and is advocating against demolition of any buildings there. There should be a creative solution to save and continue utilizing the buildings.

Chair Vernon said that developer Kalan Haywood, Sr. owns the Prince Hall building, was not present at this meeting to participate, and intends to still operate there. She would want to learn of his position on the matter.

Major Stouder replied. They leased the lodge building in 1979 and purchased it in 1983. It was cost prohibitive to improve their existing two buildings. Their services would have to be reduced. They cannot discuss and comment on sale of the Cab Company building at this time.

Mr. Sauve testified in opposition. In his opinion the lodge building is a basic block building with only the 3 arches resembling new formalism. The lodge is where the homeless shelter is at. The Cab Company building has precast materials, windows, and also has the arches. There could be the possibility to preserve the Cab Company building despite challenges in doing so. The proposed new facility could memorialize the historic significance of the plaza and Alonzo Robinson in some way. The Prince Hall building would not be impacted by the new development.

Mr. Askin said that the designation would be for a district consisting of the whole block containing the three buildings mentioned. The designation would forbid any demolition of those buildings. The Lee Holloway clinic and liquor store building is also known as the Cab Company building. Current rules allow for any City resident, regardless of proximity, to apply for historic designation of any City building, site, or district. City designation will be reviewed by the City's Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee meeting on April 15, 2025 and the Common Council meeting on April 22, 2025.

Members discussed preservation of Black history and works as a priority for Bronzeville and wanted to engage the community for their input before making any advisory commendation.

Member Boynes moved that the committee hold a public community meeting to gather community input followed by making an advisory recommendation at the conclusion of the meeting. There was no objection.

c. DCD Commercial Corridor updates.

Matthew Rejc, DCD Commercial Corridor, said that the grant process was more competitive this year due to lower budgeted funds, applications are still being accepted, and there were no new updates regarding businesses receiving grants within Bronzeville that he was aware of.

d. DCD Real Estate updates.

There was no update.

e. Other.

There was no other discussion.

5. Public comments and/or announcements.

Chair Vernon announced today's opening day to accept applications for the Greater Milwaukee Foundation cycle 1 grant with an application deadline of April 4, 2025.

Member Smith announced a Jazz saxophonist performance by Lakecia Benjamin at the Milwaukee Performing Arts Center on April 11, 2025 at 7:30 p.m.

Marty Wall, resident, provided public testimony for there to be consideration by the City to keep ownership of vacant lots and to out deed restrictions for homeownership of those lots similar to having co-op home ownership.

6. Next steps.

- a. Agenda items for the next meeting.*
- b. Next meeting date and time. (Monday, May 19, 2025 at 9 am)*

A special joint public community meeting with Ald. Coggs' office to be scheduled and determined for the second week of April 2025 for the purpose of gathering public testimony followed by committee recommendation on the proposed permanent historic designation of the Central City Plaza Historic District.

Agenda items to be determined for next regular meeting.

Member Garrison asked the committee to possibly consider having meetings on Tuesdays or Thursdays going forward.

7. Adjournment.

Meeting adjourned at 11:13 a.m.

*Chris Lee, Staff Assistant
Council Records Section
City Clerk's Office*