

## HRA: Urban Renewal Plan ‘not a done deed’ as board gathers public’s feedback

By Dolores Sauca Lorusso

As the Hull Redevelopment Authority continues to collect public input on its draft Urban Renewal Plan, members say they are looking for a “happy medium” between those who would leave the land untouched and those who favor larger-scale development. The authority put the draft plan on the table as a “baseline” to get a conversation started.

“We knew we were going to have to move off it and come up with something that works,” Chair Bartley Kelly said at the authority’s meeting Monday night. “A lot of people want completely open space; I think there is a certain group that wants nothing to happen at all... In my opinion, people need to take a hard look at what’s on the table here and understand that there is a certain amount of development that’s going to need to happen to get the improvements, the road changes, and the park spaces.” The authority has delayed its next set of public meetings, originally scheduled for late April, while the consultants compile and analyze the feedback from the meetings held to date.

“So, what we are not getting from a lot of people that are participating is, where are the changes that allow some sort of development to accomplish the goals moving forward?” Kelly asked.

Leaving the land “as-is” is not something the **HRA** is willing to entertain because that option does not bring economic development to town, he said.

“Doing nothing is not an option,” Kelly said. “If we don’t do anything, it is going to remain looking pretty blighted like it does now.”

However, whatever stream of income the property generates must “sustainable” to ensure whatever improvements are made can be maintained, he said, as there are costs associated with everything people are thinking about doing on the property. **HRA** member Dennis Zaia pointed out that when people look at the renderings of the buildings, they think it is a “done deed, but it is not a done deed.” He also acknowledged the importance of making the **HRA** website simple for people to understand while keeping a history of the presentations to date.

“We need to do all we can to make sure people don’t misunderstand what they are seeing and know how to get the most current information... the slides need to be updated with the new information to show we are listening and learning,” Zaia said. “We don’t want to lose the history of where we were, so we can see where we are going, and where we can be.”

Providing “clarity” to visitors of the **HRA** website was a common theme at Monday’s meeting. The **HRA** wants the public to know that members are looking to make sure every slide has information citizens can “embrace and understand.” They are working to provide explanation and data, so people are not “misled inadvertently.”

“In the absence of the data, people are making up their own stories right now because they are seeing images that scare the living heck out of them,” said Zaia adding, “And even me, when I saw some of those buildings.”