

Connecticut Municipal Redevelopment Authority (MRDA)

Board of Directors Meeting

Thursday, March 20, 2025; 1:30pm – Hybrid at Parkville Market Conference Room, 1400 Park Street, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06106 with Virtual Option

Board Members Present: Chairperson Felix Reyes*; Sara Amato*; Gary Anderson; Jack Benjamin*; Emma Cimino*; Karen DuBois-Walton; Laura Francis*; Kiley Gosselin; Paul Hinsch; Laoise King; Brendan Mahoney; Matt Pugliese*; and Jessica Vonashek*

Board Members Absent: Vice Chairperson Seila Mosquera-Bruno; Alexandra Daum; and Lisa Morrissey

*Board members present in person

MRDA Staff Present: David Kooris

1. Meeting Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairperson Reyes called the to order at 1:34 PM and, following roll call, acknowledged quorum.

2. Approval of Minutes from February 20, 2025 Meeting

The motion to approve the minutes was made by Laura Francis and second by Emma Cimino. The motion was approved unanimously.

3. Public Comment

No member of the public gave comment.

4. Executive Director Report

Mr. Kooris began with an operational update. He explained that the Authority's outside counsel, Pullman Comley, has been working to create the master form contract that will govern all consultant relationships and that he hoped to get BerlinRosen, Berry Dunn, and the on-call consultants formally under contract soon. He updated the Board that he had selected an IT consultant who is familiar with quasi-public authorities and FOIA. Mr. Kooris received three quotes and the monthly rate of the selected firm is well below the threshold to require an RFP or board approval. He explained that he is embarking on the same process regarding accounting services.

Mr. Kooris then provided an update on municipal engagement and proudly announced that nine municipalities had opted in as of March 20th. The list as of the Board meeting was, in alphabetical order: Derby, Enfield, Naugatuck, New London, Norwich, Old Saybrook, Seymour, Torrington, and Waterbury. With six municipalities having joined since the prior board

meeting, Mr. Kooris expects continued adoption of the opt-in resolution by more municipalities over the coming months. In response to questions from the Board, he indicated that he is now starting to meet with those member municipalities, review their zoning, get a detailed sense of where the Authority can be most supportive, and assign on-call consultant support to each. That said, there is not a ton of funding for those efforts and so we'll need to be very strategic and efficient to help communities move towards zoning and projects.

The Board engaged in a conversation about the way in which the Authority will interact with member municipalities on zoning. First, Mr. Kooris responded to questions about the municipal opt-in process. He described how some municipalities do so without significant support and others request that he join in on local legislative sessions, committee meetings, and/or public hearing. He indicated that the response has been largely positive but that two common misconceptions typically arise: communities are afraid that MRDA will force deep affordability and that they'd be ceding local control. Mr. Kooris said that these concerns are easily refuted since there is nothing in the statute about deep affordability and the relationship clearly doesn't shift any control from the municipality to the Authority. The Board then discussed the importance of updating zoning in accordance with the local Plan of Conservation and Development, ensuring that zoning is effectively implementing the municipality's vision for its future, and ensuring that the opportunities presented by the zoning are clearly articulated to the private sector partners who will deliver the housing and economic development desired by the community. Deputy Commissioner King and Jessica Vonashek highlighted the importance of helping the community understand the role of zoning and the time lag between regulation and development so folks see the nexus between zoning change and the ultimate positive outcomes years later.

Finally, Mr. Kooris updated the Board on ongoing branding efforts and invited a subset of the Board to participate in a conversation with the communications team to review some visual ideas. He indicated that the intent is to launch the website and a robust social media strategy this spring.

5. Budget Report

Mr. Kooris walked through the end of February budget report. The Authority has received three quarters of revenue payments from DECD. All payroll expenses are current and that has allowed a more accurate projected fiscal year-end estimate which has freed up some resources to serve as a buffer to carry the Authority into the next fiscal year. There is expected to be a modest lag between July 1st and the first quarterly payment from DECD and so some buffer funds will be important. He ended the budget report indicating that while no vendor or employee expense reimbursement payments have yet been made, he expects that the next monthly report will show actual expenditures being closer to year-to-date accrued expenses.

6. Insurance

Mr. Kooris explained that the insurance broker has had success with Directors and Officers coverage and Workers Compensation but is still working to secure General Liability. This item will hopefully be ready for action at the next meeting, but was not ready for this meeting.

A motion to table this item was made by Jack Benjamin and seconded by Sara Amato. The motion was approved unanimously.

7. Consultant Selection System-Wide TOD Assessment

Mr. Kooris thanked Gary Anderson, Jack Benjamin, and Kiley Gosselin for reviewing the task proposals submitted by some of the firms from the on-call list for the systemwide TOD assessment. The request was sent to six firms, all of whom responded with two joining into a combined proposal.

The proposals had a very wide range of costs from \$50,000 to ~\$490,000. The recommended team's proposal was one of the more costly but seemed to accurately understand and account for the breadth and depth of the desired scope. The recommendation to the board is to authorize the Executive Director to negotiate a final cost and scope with the team not to exceed \$500,000 to provide maximum flexibility. The intent is to have the final task be less costly than that upper-end amount.

The effort will build on prior studies, make use of existing datasets at the COGs, OPM, and other entities, and attempt to fill gaps and add value so that the final product is a culmination of a lot of TOD efforts in the state that sets a new baseline for the Authority's and state agency activities. Every station area in the state will be categorized and the results will help the Authority better prioritize where to allocate planning support, infrastructure investment, and project financing. There was discussion about how to make the process transparent and clear so that stakeholders understand the way in which we prioritize our activities. There was a lot of emphasis on having outcomes of different types and scales to show that TOD is not a one-size-fits-all strategy and that there is room in a wide variety of communities to build more walkable, mixed-use, and transit-oriented neighborhoods in a way that is appropriate for them.

The reviewers felt that FHI/IMEG was the best consultant lead for this effort because of their understanding of available data, the range of community types in the state, their precedent analysis in parts of Connecticut, their national TOD database (with Aecom), and their understanding of the goals of the project and flexibility in being part of the Authority team to deliver on our vision.

The motion to authorize the Executive Director to enter into a contract with FHI now IMEG for the completion of this task for a cost not to exceed \$500,000 was made by Laura Francis and seconded by Sara Amato. The motion was approved unanimously.

8. Entity Name Change

As has been discussed by the Board at previous meetings, there were many name options floated and weighed. A proposal was made for a modest change to replace "Redevelopment" with "Development" given that the latter is more positive and forward looking.

The motion to modify the Authority's name to the Connecticut Municipal Development Authority (CMDA) was made by Jessica Vonashek and seconded by Jack Benjamin. The motion was approved unanimously.

9. Old & New Business

In response to a question about legislative priorities, Mr. Kooris indicated that he had submitted some modest language requests for consideration. The first is regarding the name change just acted on by the Board. The second would enable Boards of Selectmen to pass the resolution to "join" CMDA rather than a full Town Meeting. Additionally, the suburban towns surrounding Hartford have requested the ability to work with CMDA and Mr. Kooris has conveyed his openness to enabling them to do so.

Regarding legislative initiatives of others, Mr. Kooris listed some agency-led initiatives that he has supported including DECD's proposed Greyfield Redevelopment Program and DEEP's release-based remediation standards. There are several other TOD or zoning-related bills and Mr. Kooris has consistently stated that, whatever the legislature passes, we will subsequently work with OPM and other empowered entities to coordinate our efforts to ensure that those new tools and CMDA are operating in a complementary many and creating the greatest positive impact for the state.

10. Adjournment

The motion to adjourn was made by Matt Pugliese and seconded by Emma Cimino. The Board adjourned at 2:46 PM.