

# UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS CITY BEAUTIFUL CORPORATION

## MEETING MINUTES

Monday, February 26, 2024

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### I. Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Brennan at 7:00 p.m.

Board Members present: Michael Dylan Brennan Michele Weiss  
Sheri Sax Geoff Englebrecht  
John Rach Shawn Belt

Board Members absent: Susan Drucker

Others present: Deanna Bremer Fisher, Dennis Kennedy, Joe Gibbons

Others absent:

Ms. Weiss made a motion to excuse Ms. Drucker. Mr. Brennan seconded. A voice vote was taken, and the ayes carried the vote.

### II. Approval of Minutes

December 6, 2023 - Mr. Brennan made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Weiss seconded. A voice vote was taken, and the ayes carried the vote unanimously.

Feb. 6, 2024 - Mr. Brennan made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Sax seconded. Mr. Rach noted that the date on the minutes needed to be corrected to Feb. 6, 2024. A voice vote was taken, and the ayes carried the vote unanimously.

### III. CIC Meeting Schedule

Mr. Brennan requested that members review CIC meeting dates once again as the April 17 date did not work for Ms. Sax. The dates were Apr. 17, 2024; Sept. 18, 2024; and Dec. 18, 2024. After consulting calendars, members agreed that the April 17 date could be moved to April 18, subject to a check with Ms. Drucker. The other dates worked for all present. Mr. Brennan made a motion to change the April date to April 18, subject to Ms. Drucker's OK. Mr. Rach seconded. A voice vote was taken, and the ayes carried the vote unanimously.

### IV. Insurance Policy Renewal

Mr. Kennedy presented the general liability insurance renewal. He noted that there was no price increase on the policy. Mr. Brennan made a motion to authorize the renewal of the insurance policy at a cost of \$1,964. Mr. Englebrecht seconded. A voice vote was taken, and the ayes carried the vote unanimously.

## V. Governance

Mr. Brennan proposed that the CIC add two additional residents to the board, chosen by the mayor and that it institute a two thirds majority vote on substantive matters. Mr. Belt stated that he would be fine with adding two additional residents provided they were voted on by a majority of the board and that, alternatively, he would be fine with keeping the board the same and making the majority 5 out of 7. When asked to explain his reasoning, he stated that, because the CIC is apolitical, it shouldn't be hard to get that majority. It would mean that anything that is agreed upon has the support of a majority of the people. Ms. Sax stated that she was concerned that if one or two people were absent it would be harder to pass a motion and harder to move things forward. Ms. Weiss stated she wasn't necessarily opposed to the 5-7 majority; however, she was concerned that it undermines the citizen member and the two administrative director members' opinions. She stated that it would seem that they were being asked to vote either with the administration or with city council, and that it should be a collaborative experience, rather than a divisive board. She did not agree that the CIC needs more members. "Seven is a good number; nine is a lot," she said. Mr. Rach stated that he did not support a change at this time. Mr. Englebrecht said that he is open to the change as long as it is able to move the CIC forward. Mr. Rach said he felt that the change is to respect the wishes of a current board member as opposed to thinking long term and that he wanted to see that the rules remain consistent. Ms. Weiss stated that the group should table a decision until Ms. Drucker is present. Mr. Belt stated that he would like to be on a useful board, but that he respected the point that Mr. Rach didn't feel comfortable making a change due to one person's request. Mr. Rach said, "Why change a perfectly good governance structure? If it means that the CIC isn't going to function for two years then that's how government works some times." Mr. Brennan said, "Rather than having two more years of blockade, we have a solution at hand where we can move forward and be productive. I don't see why we wouldn't want to be productive if we could be. I think that this is an essential thing to do to rectify a situation that came up and avoid having it happen again." He suggested that the CIC could make decisions unanimous and require 7 out of 7 because "we want this to be consensus-driven." He stated that all voices count, but that requiring unanimity would make it harder so 5 out of 7 would be better. "I don't think we should embrace the idea that we continue to be dysfunctional when we can resolve this in relatively short order," he said. Mr. Belt stated that there are two options: the CIC could either vote on the proposed governance change or one person could change his behavior. "Because one thing happened in the past, it shouldn't color everything that happens in the future," he said. Ms. Weiss stated that all CIC board members were equal and that the CIC could elect to hire an executive director. "It is one person that is having an issue here," she said. Mr. Belt stated that even if the CIC made governance changes, there could be pushback from the administration. Mr. Brennan conceded that, in most instances, 5-7 would suffice based on the idea that the CIC should be doing things that are widely supported by all stakeholders. Ms. Weiss asked Mr. Gibbons his opinion. He stated that a supermajority could be

done and that he had encountered boards that had voting requirements for certain types of issues, more substantive ones. “Some might require unanimous approval, and it depends on the issues you are talking about,” he said. Mr. Rach stated that he remembered that a “certain politician in the room’ back in August claimed that a majority rule, rather than a supermajority, should be required to change the Ohio constitution, which is not too far off from what we are talking about here.” Ms. Weiss motioned for the topic to be tabled until Ms. Drucker could be present. Mr. Belt seconded. A voice vote was taken. Mr. Rach and Ms. Sax voted “nay.” All other members voted “yay,” and the motion passed.

Regarding the issue of a second CIC for the University Square Garage project, Mr. Gibbons stated that the statute is silent. He contacted the Ohio Attorney General’s office and Ohio Municipal League, and neither had an answer. He suggested that the simplest course of action would be to apply for the second CIC, and then the Ohio Attorney General would have to decide. The Ohio Municipal League suggested creating a Port Authority, which can do similar things as a CIC. Mr. Brennan stated that the City was seeking to create a single-issue entity, not unlike a single-issue LLC. He suggested moving ahead to create a second CIC and seeing if it is approved. This would be an action of the city government, rather than the City Beautiful Corporation. Following some discussion, he asked Ms. Bremer Fisher, who ran a CDC for 14 years, to explain how a CIC is different from a CDC. She stated that CDCs are generally created by the people of a community, whereas CICs are created by a local government. CDCs rarely have elected officials on their boards of directors, although they sometimes have them as ex officio, non-voting members. The majority of the board is composed of members of the community it serves. While a CDC may have contracts with a local government to do certain work, it is an independent entity. Ms. Weiss asked Mr. Kennedy about the steps to get a CIC approved and required structure of the bylaws. Mr. Kennedy stated that he was unable to provide details on the spot. Mr. Gibbons stated that a municipal government creates a port authority. Ms. Weiss asked him to research the benefit of having another CIC vs. having a port authority. Mr. Brennan agreed. Mr. Kennedy offered to contact a friend at a port authority.

## **VI. Beautification**

Ms. Weiss referred to a meeting that took place 2-3 years ago where residents gave input regarding the West End of the city. She recalled that among the ideas was that landscaping, such as flowers and benches, would make a tangible difference. Mr. Belt asked to see a list of the residents’ ideas and asked for clarification on the footprint of the West End. Mr. Rach referred to the Cedar Taylor Merchants Association’s improvements to the streetscape along Taylor Road several years ago and stated that it made sense to have consistency on both sides of the street, regardless of whether one side was in Cleveland Heights and the other in University Heights. He stated that branding and public art create a unique sense of place and enhance walkability, and that the CIC could work with Shaker Heights and JCU to create a sense of

place at Fairmount Circle. Mr. Englebrecht stated that there have been calls for placemaking elements at Cedar and Taylor roads. He suggested murals or another placemaking element at Cedar and Taylor, such as a statue of Superman—or of the City’s brand ambassador, Cooper. He recommended having discussions with the community first before seeking funding. Placemaking elements were not included in the initial funding for the Bicycle Boulevards project. Ms. Weiss stated that she would bring the list of residents’ ideas from several years ago to the next meeting. Mr. Belt said that he would like to do something at the corner of Cedar and Taylor roads and make it a gateway to the city. This would increase the appeal of the new townhomes in that area. Mr. Brennan suggested that city staff reach out to Mr. Garber at Garber’s upholstery about a mural. Ms. Bremer Fisher mentioned that she is serving on Heights Arts’ public art team and that the organization has expertise in public art. She also mentioned that graffiti had been an issue in the Cedar Taylor neighborhood.

Ms. Weiss stated that the City has exterior maintenance and business loans available and proposed a loan that could enable residents to cut down trees. She suggested a \$10,000 fund that could give a maximum loan, interest free, of \$2,000 per person for landscaping. Mr. Brennan suggested establishing a lien right to protect the City if someone were to sell their property so that the CIC could be paid back. He asked Mr. Gibbons to research similar programs. Ms. Sax suggested a pilot project that would be replenished as it was paid back.

## **VII. Development**

On the topic of the vacant lot at the corner of Fenwick and Silsby roads, Ms. Weiss stated that it was possibly too small for a house and asked if it could be the site of a pocket park. She asked Mr. Englebrecht to look into it and confirm the lot size. Mr. Brennan asked Mr. Englebrecht to talk with neighbors to seek their input. Mr. Rach stated that typically pocket parks are put in where there are “park deserts,” and said that he’d “rather see more money going to The Walt.” Mr. Belt suggested that the lot could be planted with species that do well in the shade and that there could be information at the pocket park to educate residents about what they can plant in shady backyards.

## **VIII. Miscellaneous**

On the subject of a grant writer, Ms. Weiss stated that it would benefit the CIC to hire one because there are many grants available for various projects that aren’t being utilized. She suggested that if the grant writer were a consultant, paid per diem, it could be a win-win for the City and something the CIC should consider.

Mr. Belt stated that homeowners in areas of the city that were built in the ‘40s have issues with front steps crumbling and asked how the CIC could help homeowners with information, contacts, or loans to get them fixed. He stated that due to cost, many homeowners attempt to fix them themselves, but that

those repairs don't last long. Mr. Brennan agreed that residents often end up with sticker shock when they find out how much it costs. Ms. Weiss suggested that the CIC could create another pilot project. Mr. Englebrecht stated that aluminum siding on these homes is starting to rust and stain. Mr. Brennan suggested that City staff could explore whether the Heritage Home Program could help with this and stated that "it might be a matter of getting the word out."

#### **IX. Old Business**

Mr. Rach stated that he had concerns about the townhome project on Taylor Road and wanted this to be an ongoing conversation. Specifically, he is concerned about the pace of construction and the prices. The agreement with the developer was to build 30 townhomes at a price of \$300,00 each. So far, 4 have been built, they have been listed for sale for \$569,000, and none have sold. He would like to review the development agreement and the timeline with the developer. He stated that now that the price is higher, the quality should be higher. University Heights was successful in getting a grant for bike lanes, which will remove public parking on Taylor Road, and he is concerned about where guests will park. He suggested that the CIC review the contract. Following discussion, Mr. Brennan requested that Ms. Bremer Fisher send Mr. Gibbons the development agreement to review.

#### **X. New Business**

There was no new business.

#### **XI. Motion to Adjourn**

Mr. Brennan made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Rach seconded. A voice vote was taken. The ayes had it and the meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.