

CITY OF JOHNSTOWN PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, March 5, 2025

CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, ROLL CALL:

The meeting was called to order at 5:03 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The following members of Planning Commission were present for roll call:

Chairman Carthew and Commissioners Grandinetti, Buday, White, and Shirt. Commissioner Huchel was not present for roll call, but arrived at a later time.

In addition, Codes Enforcement Manager Dave Williams, City Manager Art Martynuska, and Assistant City Manager Capriotti were present. Barry Polster was also in attendance.

Chairman Carthew called the meeting to recess for the public hearing for the five-year consolidation plan for the City of Johnstown. He added that the planning commission meeting would reconvene upon the completion of the public hearing.

John Rutledge, Director of Community and Economic Development, presented to review the '25-'29 five-year consolidated plan. He reported that Karl Haglund and Mike Long were also present from Urban Design Ventures.

Mr. Haglund mentioned they would discuss what the city's needs are for the next five-year plan. He noted three documents would be referenced. The first document was the five-year consolidated plan for the CDBEG and home program, which outlines the needs and would be broken apart by housing, homelessness, other special needs, community development, economic development, and planning. The second document was the annual action plan, and it notes the implementation of each goal on a yearly basis that is identified within the five-year plan. The third document was the analysis impediment to fair housing choice. This covers what prevents someone from living wherever they want to within the city.

Mr. Haglund first reviewed the eligible CDBG activities. These activities can be acquisition of real property, relocation or demolition, rehab of residential and non-residential structures, the construction of public facility and improvements. He noted that ineligible CDBG activities are acquisition, construction, and reconstructions of buildings for the general conduct of business for city government. City hall would not be eligible for use. He stated, if city hall needed to have an ADA accessible door installed for the public use, that

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would be an eligible use. CDBG funds cannot be used by the city to build houses, but a non-profit development organization can be funded with the CDBG funds.

Mr. Long stated the HOME federal funding the city received is very similar to CDBG funds. He added that it is put together with the same five-year consolidated plan. Mr. Long reported that unlike CDBG, the home funds are exclusively focused on housing and home funds may use for activities such as: the new construction of affordable housing, including the rehabilitation of affordable housing and the reconstruction of affordable housing and conversion to affordable housing. It also includes site improvements related to the development of affordable housing and the refinancing of debt on a single family. The HOME funds can assist with reducing the overall monthly housing cost to make it more affordable.

Mr. Long reported, for the 2025 Annual Action Plan, it is anticipated the City of Johnstown to receive approximately \$1.2 million in CDBG funds and approximately \$180,000 in HOME funds. Mr. Haglund added that this approximation is all tied in with the federal budget. The estimated amounts may increase or decrease.

Mr. Long presented a review of past performance and mentioned the City of Johnstown has a good performance record with HUD. The city meets its established performance standards regularly. The report is submitted to HUD within 90 days after the start of the next program year and is available for review at the City of Johnstown's Department of Community and Economic Development.

He reported, in 2023, the City of Johnstown expended 92% of its CDBG funds to benefit low- and moderate-income residents. He added the city also expended only 3.15% of its funds during the 2023 period on public services, which falls below the statutory maximum of 15. Mr. Haglund further explained with public service. CDBG allows you to go up to 15% of your allocation to fund public service activities. He stated the city does not go to 15% and usually goes to 3-4%. He explained that is the reason why it is 3.15% of the total allocation that goes to public service. Mr. Haglund explained the rest of the money has been going to housing rehab or capital improvement projects.

Mr. Haglund explained that admin can be maxed out at 20%, but cannot go over that amount. He explained the city is at their 20% for administration. Mr. Haglund was questioned if he felt 3% was low. Mr. Haglund stated it would depend on the community and what their needs are.

Mr. Williams was asked if the city staff looks at the funds each year to evaluate what they may need to adjust or if they just kind of do what works for them. Mr. Williams stated they just do what has been working for them.

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Mr. Haglund stated every year there is this first public hearing that takes place and it asks the public what their needs are. He mentioned a person could come to the meeting and request to have down payment assistance for closing costs. He stated a key part to the meetings is to meet with the public and also meet with the department heads to determine their needs.

Mr. Haglund was questioned as to how many public meetings are scheduled. Mr. Haglund confirmed there are two public meetings- one tonight and another one is on the way. He added, on top of the meetings, they have agencies and organization surveys, stakeholder, resident surveys, and also having nonprofit stakeholder meetings. Mr. Haglund reported meeting with housing agencies, community development agencies, economic development agencies, churches, social service, and homeless agencies.

Further discussion was held regarding getting the word out and increasing the public's interest and knowledge of what is happening with the city and Urban Design Ventures.

Mr. Long reported survey participation has been good so far. Mr. Haglund mentioned there are paper copies for the Commission members.

Mr. Haglund was questioned if home activities and costs are income based. He confirmed that it is all income based and reported it is up to 80% AMI. Mr. Haglund stated he would give an exact number on the survey on how much money a single person would receive.

Mr. Haglund was also asked if he had an end date for all of the community engagement and all of the data and surveying information. Mr. Haglund stated they are kind of at an unknown currently due to the federal budget. They are hoping that it comes out within the next two weeks because that will be the next step in the process. He added once that happens, HUD has 60 days to notify all community members what their allocations will be. Mr. Haglund hoped the plans will be on display the end of June, July, and possibly approved by August. He also hopes to have drafts of all the needed documents by May.

City Manager Martynuska and Mr. Rutledge were questioned as to who was asking what the staff number was. He stated they have people who can administer. Mr. Rutledge was questioned as to what he would focus on as the new director and whether there was staff inhouse to administer to these programs.

Mr. Rutledge reported that he just started his third week with the city. It was noted he is the fiscal officer, and Jen and Missy are still present. He just started going through things that were done during the pre-round period and felt that there were many good programs out there and they like working with Mr. Haglund. He was hopeful that they can obtain

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other programs that will be beneficial instead of just copycatting the same ones they have currently. Mr. Rutledge added that he believed they "have a pretty good staff right now."

Mr. Haglund asked the Commission if it had any needs that it would like to make him aware of.

Chairman Carthew mentioned that he did have a couple items. He stated he is on the capture team of the non-profit Vision Together 2025 and added that they concentrate on preserving historic buildings. He noted the adaptive reuse and preservation team concentrates on historic buildings and downtown buildings that support residential living on the upper floors. Vision Together 2025 is aware that the city has a facade program and he added that Vision Together has also developed a facade program. Chairman Carthew thought maybe some guidelines could be developed to further help with the facade program.

Chairman Carthew stated Vision Together 2025 spoke about the historic overlay district and added that there was one done in the Cambria City neighborhood years ago. He stated they were thinking maybe some planning assistance under the five-year plan could be implemented for a historic overlay zoning district within the central business district. He reported there are around 100 historic structures downtown and there are about a dozen at risk. Chairman Carthew would like to maintain the character of these buildings within the neighborhood and would like to have an overlay created to help identify these buildings. He hoped some interest will be sparked to work with the owners to help stabilize these buildings. It was noted that there is not a historic review commission.

The third item Chairman Carthew wanted to share was this all complements the city's blight elimination. He stated the last resort for a building is demolition. He questioned if the city could identify the buildings that are vacant and starting to decay to create a plan for rehab and stabilization efforts. Chairman Carthew stated some people on the committee and capture team have identified over 200 homes that could be potentially rehabbed within the city. He stated that level of rehab needed would be across the board and would include minor, major, and substantial.

Mr. Haglund was asked by Chairman Carthew what percentage of the City of Johnstown is low mod and he also questioned when the last survey was completed to identify a change in the mod district. Mr. Haglund reported that HUD and the census provide the low mod decision and data. Age, population, age of stock, and income are combined to establish their low mod areas. He noted the last one included the data ranging from 2016 to 2020. Mr. Haglund did not have the percentage of Johnstown that is considered low mod with him, but stated he could provide that information. He stated it is definitely over 51% low mod. Discussion followed regarding if there are any plans to resurvey to see if the low mod percentage will increase. Per Mr. Haglund, there are not since everything is done

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through HUD. He mentioned that HUD does the survey based off of the ACS data because they break it down by census tracts and blockers. Mr. Haglund mentioned if the city chose not to go with HUD's analysis, the city would have to go door to door to perform an income survey for each person there.

Mr. Grandinetti stated he was looking into low mod identification and classification and added that it opens up many doors for CBDG funding. He mentioned some of the low mod benefits are using the money for the installation of new paved streets, sidewalks, curbs, and gutters. He noted that this opens up a lot of activity up in the low mod areas.

Mr. Britt questioned if sidewalks and streets are not in the line-item budget as previously mentioned. Mr. Haglund stated sidewalks are in the budget, but the streets are not. Mr. Britt stated he wanted to ask because he is starting to see streets deteriorate. He added that he does not want to see them get to the point where they are taking almost 10 or 20% of the nine-item budget to repair streets. Mr. Haglund stated it was definitely brought up that the streets are a need within the community.

Mr. Grandinetti mentioned years ago, CBDG funding was utilized to employ public works employees to do specific jobs. He added that all of these people were paid out of the CBDG funding and everyone could see the improvements being done and it was all in low mod. He stated the 2016 landscape of Johnstown needs to be reviewed and some doors need opened to come up with new ideas to improve neighborhoods. Mr. Britt stated many times the city did a matching fund and would match whatever the state would give. He added that is how the city was able to get a lot of work done

Mr. Williams mentioned there should be a little pause on the streets. He reported the city just went through a major sewer project and added that just about every street was repaved. The gas company is now ripping up all of the streets and is repaving them. He added the next project will be the lead water line and noted that some of the streets have been paved three times within the last 10 years.

Discussion was held regarding code enforcement officers and how that is listed as an eligible expense. Mr. Haglund confirmed that this has not been completely talked about and mentioned the rules with that have changed. Mr. Williams stated they needed to explore any kind of funding source to help their existing staff and to not have it coming out of the general fund. He added that they have done things in the past and it has worked despite the Pittsburgh office stating that it is no longer an eligible expense.

Mr. Haglund explained matching funds for grants. He noted, if it is a federal grant, many times it does not allow a federal match. If the grant allows federal, then CDBG can be used as a match. State Funding is also all tied to the grant and whatever it says goes.

Mr. Haglund reported the second public meeting cannot occur until they have an allocation.
Chairman Carthew thanked Urban Design Ventures and added that they would continue with the surveys.

The public hearing for the five-year consolidation concluded.

PUBLIC COMMENT (AGENDA ITEMS):

No comment was offered by members of the public.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. White motioned to approve the Minutes of the February 5, 2025 Planning Commission meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Huchel. A roll call vote was taken:

Planning Commission:

Laura Huchel- YES
Michael Grandinetti- YES
Donald Buday – YES
James White – YES
Ian Shirt- YES
James Carthew – Chairman – YES
The motion passed unanimously.

ACTION ITEMS:

None.

OLD BUSINESS:

URBAN MURAL PROGRAM

Mr. Barry Polster was in attendance. Chairman Carthew reported the planning commission could be an advisory committee to this public art program through the city. He hoped that the Board still shares support for this and he will keep the Commission updated as things move along. Chairman Carthew asked the Commission if it had any questions or updates regarding this. No questions or updates were voiced.

GIS SOFTWARE

Dave Williams reported he did not have any updates. City Manager Martynuska mentioned there have been newspaper articles about the city's partnership with Laurel Municipal for codes. He

noted part of that initiative is to have gentleman from the fire department go out, take areas of the city, East Mill, and perform actual surveys down the main drags and in the alleys of every neighborhood in preparation for property maintenance.

City Manager Martynuska reported that he met with Cambria County GIS last week and one of the things that they are looking to incorporate to increase efficiency is to put 360 cameras on top of the two fire engines for the city. These will also be placed on the roof of the squad that comes out of headquarters here so they can map as they are driving down the road.

In addition, City Manager Martynuska reported they will also begin to fly drones over rooftops to obtain a better view of what they cannot see. He noted this will be tied into property maintenance and this will tie back in with Cambria County GIS and the GIS software that has been announced. This will all be for residential.

City Manager Martynuska noted that the fire department is also making a more concerted effort when they are out on calls. The nature of the call will be handled first, but then they will try to obtain further information on property ownership. The department will try to find out if it is a rental or residential property, who the landlord may be, and will then enter that into the database for the rent residential inspection and also the residential registration program.

Chairman Carthew questioned where the city was at with the vacant property survey. Mr. Williams reported that he has the database set-up on his computer and he estimates that there is between 3 and 500 on it currently. He stated vacant properties could be a vacant property with or without a house that may have code violations outstanding. Mr. Williams stated they will send out the vacant property fee that needs to be paid on a yearly basis of \$300.00. If this does not get paid, the fee then increases to \$1,000.00. After that, he mentioned it could be sent to Laurel for criminal charges or it could be kept in house. It was suggested at the next meeting that Mr. Williams provide information regarding the ordinance and report where the city is at currently with how many vacant properties. It was noted a vacant property is considered to be unoccupied with property maintenance code violations on them.

PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENT

City Manager Martynuska reported there are several projects going on currently. He reported the public safety building is still in a holding pattern because of funding. He added that they have some funding in place to do rehab and remodeling, but not enough for the entire project. They do not have the funds to build a new building.

City Manager Martynuska stated they started Monday with putting security cameras into all of the parking decks. This project started at Lincoln Street and will continue.

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He mentioned that they did a walkthrough with their engineering firm last week and determined where they are going to open the rest of that structure up at. They also evaluated the things that need to be fixed and they were deemed to be more cosmetic than structural. City Manager Martynuska noted that safety was also evaluate and they will be placing some barricades up. He hoped that the garage would soon be opened as he was aware of some people who were interested in some long-term leasing there.

City Manager Martynuska reported one of their restaurant tenants, Primos, has given a verbal commitment to stay in the Main Street East restaurant and are renewing their contract.

He noted waiting for a final commitment or final cost from one of the city's vendors to do a citywide security system that will link all buildings together with keypad systems, so there will not be multiple keys. City Manager Martynuska stated this would also allow them to control all buildings from a central location.

Chairman Carthew questioned if some of the mentioned projects are going to be paid for by the ARPA funding. City Manager Martynuska confirmed that to be correct.

City Manager Martynuska reported funding from a private donor came through for the final rehab, demolition, and remediation of the Sheeley buildings on Horner Street. The building that is still remaining will be remodeled and rehabbed for the fire training facility. He added that they do have some available funds to put a small storage facility there, which is needed. It was noted that JRA is administering the demolition on the Sheeley buildings.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Chairman Carthew reported that Rothschild's consulting firm out of Pittsburgh is moving along nicely. He saw their updates in terms of their community engagement, and they continue to work towards that. He stated they are still about a month or two out before they can get an initial draft prepared from all of the collected data. Chairman Carthew is looking forward to seeing the draft and added that will kind of steer how the comprehensive plan goes. Chairman Carthew will be sure to get the Rothschild's e-mail over to the Commission.

City Manager Martynuska requested that a virtual introduction between Katie at Rothschild's and Mr. Haglund, so they can help relay dialogue on both project plans.

ZONING OFFICER

Mr. Williams reported he is waiting to hear back from Mr. Andrews regarding the sidewalk program.

Chairman Carthew noted the sale of animals was clarified and Ms. Huchel mentioned the adoption of animals is okay. Chairman Carthew stated they would close that item.

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Chairman Carthew stated they were informed last month that due to the money allocation of funds; the Main Street and Central Park revitalization program project have to be separated. City Manager Martynuska stated the projects are still moving along and meetings are taking place. He hoped the city would see some cutbacks in the cost without losing the quality. City Manager Martynuska also believed there will be less maintenance in the long run. He is hoping a finalized document will be available in two to three weeks.

NEW MEMBER

Chairman Carthew introduced the new planning commission member, Ian Shirt. Mr. Shirt was congratulated and welcomed to the Commission.

Mr. Polster reported the annual report from the planning commission to city council is now due. He noted the importance of cooperating and knowing what each council is doing. Mr. Polster noted the 2024 report did not summarize all of the things that were done or what the council had wanted to do. Chairman Carthew mentioned that he will get together with Mr. Williams and they will start drafting the annual report.

RECESS/ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 6:09 P.M.

The next meeting will be held on April 2, 2025 at 5:00 p.m.