

**AGENDA MINUTES  
CITY COMMISSION MEETING  
CITY HALL, 501 W MEADOW STREET  
MONDAY, JULY 24, 2023 5:00 PM**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The City of Leesburg Carver Heights/Montclair Area CRA held a regular meeting on Monday, July 24, 2023, at Leesburg City Hall. Chairperson Burry called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. with the following members present:

Commissioner Allyson Berry  
Commissioner Jay Connell  
Commissioner Erika Jasper  
Commissioner Mike Pederson  
Commissioner Alan Reisman  
Chairperson Jimmy Burry

Also present were City Manager (CM) Al Minner, City Clerk (CC) J. Andi Purvis, City Attorney (CA) Grant Watson, the news media, and others.

**INVOCATION**

Chairperson Burry gave the invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**2. APPROVE MINUTES:**

**A. Regular meeting held April 24, 2023**

Commissioner Reisman made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of April 24, 2023 and Commissioner Connell seconded the motion.

Chairperson Burry asked if there were any comments or corrections. There were none.

The roll call vote was:

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Commissioner Jasper   | Yes |
| Commissioner Connell  | Yes |
| Commissioner Reisman  | Yes |
| Commissioner Pederson | Yes |
| Commissioner Berry    | Yes |

Chairperson Burry

Yes

Six years, no days, the Commission approved the meeting minutes as presented.

### **3. REVIEW PROPOSED FY 24 BUDGET:**

#### **A. Proposed FY 24 Budget**

**CM Minner** stated when they reviewed this budget at the workshop, Commissioner Jasper asked for a meeting to discuss the proposals. There was nothing formal on the agenda other than a discussion of the proposed budget. The Carver Heights CRA budget breaks down into four major components. The first, personnel, is \$85,000, which includes one position in the housing department. There are operating expenses for the Resource Center of \$96,000. There is a debt payment that goes back to the electric fund of \$96,000. That debt payment is from when we borrowed money to build the Resource Center. In the proposed budget there were three concepts. First was to fund three police officers, which would unfreeze all the positions. However, if we fund these positions from this budget, the officers would be required to work seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year, dedicated to the Carver Heights box. The amount for that is about \$230,000. The second concept was to fund \$300,000 in home improvement grants, and the third concept was to contribute \$120,000 to the Boys and Girls Club to cover grant tuition. If this body chooses to move forward with the Boys and Girls Club, that money would not be available until October 1st. We would still need to put together an agreement with the Boys and Girls Club, which would outline what kids this would benefit. Those kids would have to live in the CRA district. There are other issues, but they would work with some partnerships to make sure they have resources for teachers and those types of things. The funds would only be paid upon award. They would not receive a lump sum of \$120,000. They would receive it as it is used. He assumed they would not use all the funding in one year. The only feedback he received from the budget workshop was to pay the police officers from the general fund. If they did that, they would need to use the proposed rollback rate. Looking at the numbers, we have a rollback rate of 3.43 and a rollback rate of 3.47. That .47 is the difference from the current rate to the rollback rate of \$75,000. There is \$100,000 in the black, and they could shift money around. The difference between \$175,000 and \$230,000 they could find in other revenues that were kept low, naming franchise fees from The Villages, so they do not have any issues. If they went with the rollback rate, they could shift the police officers to the general fund. Either way, they would have a fully funded police department of seventy-three officers, programmed and paid. The strategy of building additional public safety was a problem. The police department had a hard time recruiting due to pay. They were not recruiting enough officers to keep positions filled. The first thing they did to fix that was increase the pay effective July 1st. The new starting rate for police officers is \$60,000. Through creative budgeting, we now have four of the seven positions unfrozen, leaving three positions. One way or the other, they can get back to the full seventy-three positions at the new pay rate. It gives the police chief a big valuable tool so he can recruit officers at an extremely competitive rate.

**Commissioner Jasper** said earlier this year it was stated they would have a meeting to collaborate because of new commissioners coming on the board and having new ideas. However, they did not have that meeting prior to the budget workshops. That was talked about back in March. They did not get the chance to go over their ideas before coming up with a budget. When the budget workshop meeting came, she voiced her questions and concerns, which were addressed via email, and she appreciated that. However, for a lot of the items that were budgeted, she wondered where they came from and whose ideas they were because they were not previously discussed. She previously mentioned a few ideas that she wanted to convey for the CRA budget. The city manager tried to address her concerns, but they really were not. Her concern was that they came together collectively as a group, work together as a group to

come up with what is best for the CRA. They did not do that. Now it is budget time and they have to make decisions. They never came up with ideas collectively as far as the police officers, the Boys and Girls Club, which she was in favor of, but she had questions that needed to be addressed. They talked about it, but it was never done. **CM Minner** replied that was why they are here tonight. **Commissioner Jasper** remarked that previously she proposed a vision for the CRA to take some of the income they receive and leverage that to take out a loan to expand the CRA, the roads, and infrastructure. Everyone talks about the homeless population and how that is a problem. If they go out into the Carver Heights community, they will see a lot of vacant land and property. That is where the homeless live. They talk about blight and things of that nature. If they expanded the roads and created housing, they could eliminate a lot of that. There was a block party scheduled for the past weekend in the Carver Heights community near the Elks Club at Johns and Beecher Streets. There is an empty lot there that she has been talking about for several months. They had to cage it in so people would not park in that area. If a home was there, it would not have been an issue. There are other areas of the community that need infrastructure. They are the Carver Heights Montclair Area Redevelopment Agency and that is what they do and that is what they are for. That is her goal moving forward. She would like to see that community redeveloped. They could build homes so individuals could have the American dream of homeownership. It would be an advantage for the city because it would increase tax revenues. They brought in about \$700,000. **CM Minner** pointed out that the revenue was \$746,000. Just so the numbers are not confusing; the proposed budget is \$930,000 and it would cover some of the projects described. They would use \$176,000 from the reserve and the Carver Heights CRA has about \$800,000 in a cash reserve. However, the core number is the city's and the county's increment added together, of \$750,000. There would be no borrowing catastrophe like they had in 2010 when property values dropped. They could probably count on a growth of \$750,000. If looking at page 177 of the proposed budget, under total resources, the actual in 2020-21 was \$414,344. In 2021-22 it was \$514,422 and in 2022-23 it was \$654,068. So, \$750,000 would be the next number when looking at the growth in increments. That would be the number the bank or whoever they bond through would look at and it needs to support debt.

**Commissioner Pederson** mentioned they have revenue of \$750,000 and, assuming the police officers go back to the general fund, it shows expenses of \$700,000. **CM Minner** said that was correct. If they put the police back in the general fund, the cash goes back into reserve and they would have a couple of extra coins. **Commissioner Pederson** stated there was not a lot of excess revenue. Right now, may not be a good time to leverage the funds. There is not enough money to leverage, and rates are not great. He would rather put that off for another year. If they took the police out of this fund, they would have \$697,000. **CM Minner** responded they are looking at about half a million dollars of unspent incremental money. They have a person at the Resource Center of \$86,000, operational expenses at the Resource Center of \$96,000 and a debt payment of \$96,000, which is roughly \$300,000. They will bring in about \$750,000. **Commissioner Pederson** pointed out the proposed budget also shows home improvement grants. **CM Minner** stated last year they started working on the remainder and Commissioner Connell commented on this. Some of this comes from conversations with Commissioner Berry. She asked him to put together this proposal. Commissioner Berry shifted the direction a bit and it is arguable over what is more beneficial and that is not a staff call, that is a legislative collective wisdom call. When Commissioner Berry approached him she said she had certain items on her agenda. She wanted to focus on safety, education, and improvement. This board needs to decide what to do first. Do we address issues that could potentially affect people from moving into the area and reinvesting in Carver Heights or do we bring in more housing and potentially continue to hurt Carver Heights? Prior to Commissioner Berry's election, the conversation was to invest in additional housing and use available cash after personnel, operations, and debt are paid. That was why he brought up Commissioner Connell, because there were discussions back at the Venetian Center with concern about leveraging the remaining CRA money on debt. The overall consensus of the commission, at that time, was "let's look into it". There was no overall commitment to go leverage the debt. It ranged from "let's go do it" from Commissioner Christian to "let's

be concerned about it" from Commissioner Connell. The overall direction was to go look at it. The commission members of the CRA board had concerns about debt. They went back and looked at the debt and a year later, the concept was they did not have as much money as they thought in order to leverage the debt. They had talked about three to five million dollars. However, as they did their homework on interest rates, the key was to figure out how much debt could be leveraged, without using the faith and credit of the general fund. They decided to bring that leverage amount down to one million dollars. However, that was when the world changed. Before them were the concepts that Commissioner Berry brought to him and Commissioner Jasper asked for this meeting to discuss the things mentioned. At this stage, if they leverage that, he could not answer that question. They were looking at one million dollars prior to the 13% growth. Maybe one point five million, but with inflation and interest rates going up, even with growth, the borrowing capacity is down. Instead of paying 2-3% interest rates, they are looking at 5-6% interest rates. With all things considered and to keep it out of the good faith and credit of the general fund, they are looking at a one million dollar project. They could go back and work on the Tuskegee/Alabama housing development or a couple other things. However, all items need to be tackled. The first things they need to accomplish are the safety elements of adding police officers and the redevelopment of existing housing stock with home grant investment. Instead of building new buildings, they could use existing money to improve and leverage the existing housing stock, which would have an immediate impact on raising property values as homes are redeveloped or refurbished. They have the concept of investing in the youth, which goes back to the safety element, and the youth of Carver Heights would be able to go to the Boys and Girls Club. They would have the resources needed for extra education and those types of things. There are more grass root-flavored things in the proposal, but at the end of the day he would say both are doable. He would take their directions. **Commissioner Jasper** asked if they could take the funds and pay off the debt since the Resource Center is debt for the CRA. Could they take those funds and pay off that debt, so they could move forward with leveraging more funds. **CM Minner** answered yes, they could do that. The existing debt is \$800,000, and the existing cash on hand is \$500,000. He threw out that \$800,000 number earlier and said it was cash, but he mixed up the numbers. They could take that \$500,000 and pay down the debt. That would bring down that \$800,000 liability, using all the cash. However, it would not be worth it because they would not save anything. It was an interest-free note and it was a principal payment.

**Commissioner Reisman** wanted to confirm where we were with the police officers. Will that remain in the CRA budget that he supports, or will it go back to the general fund? **Commissioner Berry** said she preferred leaving the police officers in the CRA fund. **Commissioner Reisman** clarified that this would only be for one year. **Commissioner Berry** agreed. **CM Minner** commented that as long as they keep the officers in the CRA fund, they could go with the cut rate millage. The heartbeat of the general fund for FY 24 was to increase the fire assessment, but decrease taxes, so the increase of the fire assessment fee would be as negligible as possible for the taxpayer. The police department needs more officers and we have to get back to the seventy-three officers. They were able to unfreeze four officer positions for FY 24 but we still need three more officers. If they go with the cut rate millage, with the increased assessment, they should leave the three officers in the CRA. The sole benefit was the reduction of taxes. However, the struggle will be keeping those three officers in the CRA box, which is a state law requirement. If they use CRA funds to pay for those officers, two things have to occur. First, it has to be part of the master-plan and a concept of the CRA, which public safety is. Next, those officers would have to stay in the CRA box at all times. There are four zones in the city and the Carver Heights box roughly represents one zone. The handcuffs that would put on the police chief is if something significant happens in another zone, he would end up calling that Carver Heights officer to another zone and that would be a violation. If that happened, they would have to go back and do paperwork to shorten the Carver Heights CRA fund and pay that out of the general fund because that officer was outside the box. They have to follow all the technicalities and that is a procedural issue. However, the positive thing is that we would have a cut rate tax, and more police officers. The hard part is the structural issues that hamstring the police chief.

Another way to handle this would be to pay the police officers out of the general fund. It would increase the police force, which would increase public safety. If the three police officers were funded by the general fund, they would have more officers to cover Carver Heights, and across the city. If they used the new growth revenue from The Villages in FY 25, they could build a police force beyond seventy-three. For example, if they increased the force by twelve officers, there would be eighty-five officers and there could be three or four officers in each box. They are slowly moving towards more public safety and that started with the increase in salaries. If the three police officers were in the general fund, it would allow for better coverage, flexibility, and more officers city wide. It would then take the handcuffs off the police chief because he would be able to deploy forces where needed. The flipside to that would be that they need the rollback rate. It would go from 4.245 to 4.47, and that would give an extra seventy-five thousand dollars. He would leave the decision to the commission. During the budget workshops he showed slides of how that would affect the average household of \$175,000. If they went with the rollback rate, they would pay one dollar more with the increase to the fire assessment. If they went with the cut rate, they would save about ten dollars a year. Without sounding de minimus, the difference between the rollback and cut rate is minimal. Putting the police officers in the general fund and using the rollback rate would be more advantageous for the city. **Commissioner Jasper** stated as she alluded to in the budget meeting, she does not think there is a need for three police officers in the Carver Heights CRA. That is a bit excessive because that area is not that large nor is there that much crime. She lives in that community and she knows we need more police officers, but having them restricted to this area is not beneficial. She would like the funds for the police officers to come from the general fund and not the CRA fund. As the mayor said, we do not want to compartmentalize the different areas of the city. **Commissioner Reisman** remarked that the three officers would not be working at the same time. **Commissioner Jasper** stated they did not know that. **CM Minner** asked the police chief if he knew how many officers would be in the box at one time. **PC Hicks** replied he was not comfortable talking about that in an open forum. **Commissioner Berry** questioned what the chances were of needing to deploy from another district to district one. Could that happen, since that is where higher crime is? Would there ever be a need to have officers from different zones come to district one? **CM Minner** recommended that the funds come from the general fund. Structurally, if there were three officers in that box, the Carver Heights CRA would pay for those three officers. However, this would be short term, because they are looking to get back to a full level now and then building on that in the future. This would only be for one year. We would take a percentage of that two hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars and bridge the gap with Carver Heights money to get back to those seventy-three officers. If they put it in the general fund, they could use that money and add more officers in FY 25. If they put it in the general fund now, in FY 25, they could build on that, which is what the police chief wants. **Commissioner Jasper** questioned when he said to put it back in the general fund. Was he saying to transfer funds from the CRA? **CM Minner** answered no, they would not pay for the police officers out of the CRA fund. **Commissioner Pederson** stated law enforcement should be paid out of the general fund and it would still benefit the CRA. He would support this being paid out of the general fund. However, he still did not see any leftover money after that. The budget looks good as it is. It is a change for CRA, but we have a new commissioner in that district and he respects her wishes. **CM Minner** said the difference was \$230,000 and \$175,000. If they put the officers back into the general fund, we would reduce the expenditure by \$230,000 and then use \$175,000 cash. The difference, except for \$50,000, would go back into reserves. **Commissioner Pederson** said after taking the revenue numbers, and taking out the transfer from the general fund, it puts it at \$750,000. After taking the expense of the police out, it was \$700,000. He did not see a lot of excess cash flow. **Mayor Burry** agreed. The police force should be paid out of the general fund. As Commissioner Jasper mentioned, he is hesitant to start different services for different CRAs within the city. It does not sound right. **Commissioner Pederson** stated he trusts that law enforcement would have the proper man-power to cover Carver Heights. **Commissioner Jasper** wanted to know if they need to amend the proposed budget to take that out? **Commissioner Connell** asked Commissioner Berry if they took the money out of the general fund and allowed the chief to use the three additional officers anywhere in the city, would

that accomplish what she wanted to accomplish? **Commissioner Berry** replied that she understands the need for filling the gap to make sure there is coverage all over Leesburg, but the main area experiencing crime is district one. Her recommendation was based on having officers readily available to avoid some of the issues they are experiencing now. She did the math, she understood and she did not see much difference. She respects what is already in place, but this suggestion was because there is a need for additional coverage in district one. **Commissioner Connell** agreed. He would like those officers to be paid from the CRA budget, and the officers would work just in that area. If it was paid out of the general fund, he was not sure the officers would be stationed in district one. They could be stationed all over the city. If it were paid by the CRA, they would be responsible for just that district, which accomplishes Commissioner Berry's concern. **Commissioner Reisman** asked if they had to offset the general fund and pay it back and forth. Could they have a wash if there are other officers from other districts going to the CRA district? **CM Minner** answered no. If they use CRA money to pay for the officers, those officers have to stay in that box 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. If they step out of the box and go somewhere else, that means CRA money is used by that officer to support general fund activities. **Commissioner Berry** questioned what the effects would be if another officer came into the district. **CM Minner** said there would be no effect because that would be the general fund. Just the fact they are having this discussion means if you keep the officers funded by the CRA, there could be suspicion and this could be questioned. They could question the time and resources spent on the CRA. **Commissioner Berry** stated it could be challenged because this would be new. If we do not try, we will never know. She understands and respects everyone's thoughts, but she proposed her budget and that is where they are at. **Mayor Burry** asked for any other commission comments. There were none. He asked for public comment.

Darryl Reaves, Pastor of Mt. Aarat Metropolitan Baptist Church, said he supports Commissioner Berry in the concept. Somewhere along the line, they have to stop and say this is a community that really needs help and they have never really addressed the issue this way. What is so wrong with saying okay, let's dedicate public safety to an area that desperately needs public safety. What commitment would they have if it came from the general fund and would the officers actually go to district one? There is no commitment and it does not have to happen. They have had people asking for help for a long time, yet there is always a resistance to saying okay. Why don't we try and help them for one year just to see how it works? It is only one year and then there will be great money coming in and he prays they will go from seventy-three to ninety police officers. He wants more police officers. He loves the police department, but why not give these people a chance for once? **Commissioner Jasper** asked if he could state his address. **Mr. Reaves** answered he was the Pastor of Mt. Aarat Metropolitan Baptist Church, 1108 East Main Street. **Commissioner Jasper** asked if he could provide his physical address. **Mr. Reaves** stated he was a stakeholder and he did not like being challenged. This is something they have to stop. **Commissioner Jasper** replied that she just asked a question. **Mr. Reaves** said no, and it had to stop. **Mayor Burry** pointed out for clarification that it is a requirement. When someone comes to the podium, they have to provide their name and address. **Mr. Reaves** disclosed that he was a stakeholder and the Pastor of Mt. Aarat Area Metropolitan Church, 1108 East Main Street.

**Mayor Burry** asked if they needed a motion because it appeared they had a 3-3 split. **CM Minner** agreed it was a 3-3 tie, but structurally the CRA budget was approved by the city commission. The CRA commission's function was to spend the money, not to appropriate the money. That is done through the budget process. While the CRA Commission is 3-3, he guessed it would be a 2-3 vote from the city commission to keep it in the CRA budget. However, he stressed that the way it is proposed is tricky. With hindsight being 20/20, he wished he had never brought this concept before the body. He encouraged the commission to take this back to the general fund. If they do not want to go back to the general fund, they will keep the cut tax rate, and keep three positions frozen until next fiscal year. It would not accomplish the safety mission, but it accomplishes the safety mission if they unfreeze the positions. Even though Commissioner Berry would not get that designated officer if it is put back in the general fund,

they would get more officers and more officers get more protection. In 2025, they could get more protection because they would not have to take that new revenue and spend it on a hole in the bucket. We still have August and September before formally approving the budget and it will be beaten up then. As far as a direction goes, there is not one, because they are split. There is more time to think and talk about this. He is sure there will be public feedback once the trim notices come out. Maybe that will change the feelings of how you want to vote for a rollback rate versus a cut rate. That is how the process goes and there is still considerable time. They do not need to make a decision tonight and he would encourage them not to make a decision. There were discussions on the other issues Commissioner Berry brought to the body about increasing the home grants and potentially funding the home grants. They have a contribution to the Boys and Girls Club, so there are other good things happening here. There are a lot of things being accomplished and some agendas are being changed, which will benefit Carver Heights. He suggested letting this sit and seeing where the trim notices go and seeing what the flavor of the public is after receiving the tax notice. **Commissioner Reisman** wanted to know if this could be challengeable. He asked the city manager to get an answer on that. Who could challenge it and if there was someone he could talk to? **CM Minner** responded when he said it could be challengeable, that meant by a party or person who did not like what had been done. They could challenge where the officers are spending the CRA money. **Commissioner Reisman** asked what he meant when he said party. **CM Minner** replied it would be an entity, a person, or a group. **Commissioner Reisman** said okay. **CM Minner** explained they could challenge the expenditure of that CRA money. They could challenge what officers were in the CRA box, how long they were in the box and did they go anywhere else? They could ask to see where that money went. That could be the challenge. At the end of the day, they could be challenged about funding the officers from the CRA. They would spend about one hundred thousand dollars to fund officers from the CRA. With all the hours in a day and year, if three officers were only in the CRA box for seventy-five percent of the time, that would mean they would have to kick twenty five thousand dollars from the general fund and twenty-five thousand dollars would stay in the CRA. That would be the challenge. We may think we have a benefit of one hundred thousand dollars, but if it was challenged, they would not have that benefit, plus it would stress the general fund. They would need to grab cash from the general fund to pay for that challenge. **Commissioner Berry** wondered if they could follow other cities that do this and if they could get their feedback. **CM Minner** answered there are other cities and one is West Palm Beach. They have a downtown, there is a clematis or something in that area and Delray Beach does it. He could not say structurally how that works for them and why it does not work for us, but it would be rooted in the way their police zones are and the way that their crime patterns are. It works into the ability of the CRA to keep that officer in that box 24/7. However, we have some issues that do not quite align and we have a little overlap that makes it tricky. At the end of the day, if it is funded by the general fund, they get more coverage. **Commissioner Jasper** added that the overall goal is to have more police officers. **CM Minner** agreed that was the goal.

#### 4. UPDATE LOT DONATION POLICY:

##### ITEM PULLED FROM AGENDA

**CM Minner** stated he was working with Commissioner Berry on this. He hoped to make a proposal to the commission at the August 24th meeting. It was on the agenda, but they pulled it so they could touch it up. If there are questions, let him know and he will provide more details.

**Commissioner Jasper** wanted to verify if this was about the moratorium and lots. **CM Minner** replied yes. **Commissioner Jasper** said she would like to see the moratorium lifted. How much more time do we need for this? **CM Minner** answered he was hoping to get it to them by August 24th. **Commissioner Jasper** asked if they were implementing a policy for what lots could be donated and what the breakdown was? **CM Minner** said it was a policy on how to donate lots. **Commissioner Jasper** asked if he could

provide more details. **Commissioner Reisman** stated that was what they were working on. **CM Minner** stated it was a policy for how to donate lots, what organizations can do it, who the beneficiary is and what hooks they put into it. He has been working with the housing director and she provided some revisions that are sitting in his inbox. He will get that to them as soon as he can.

**5. ROLL CALL:**

**Commissioner Berry** had no comment.

**Commissioner Pederson** had no further comment.

**Commissioner Reisman** had no comment to offer.

**Commissioner Connell** had no comment.

**Commissioner Jasper** had no further comment.

**Chairperson Burry** had no comment.

**6. ADJOURN:**

**PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES NEEDING ASSISTANCE TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY OF THESE PROCEEDINGS SHOULD CONTACT THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT, ADA COORDINATOR, AT 728-9740, 48 HOURS IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING.**

**F.S.S. 286.0105 "If a person decides to appeal any decision made by the Commission with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, they will need a record of the proceedings, and that for such purpose they may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based." The City of Leesburg does not provide this verbatim record.**

With a motion by Commissioner Reisman and seconded by Commissioner Connell, the meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m.