

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BERKS COUNTY BLIGHTED PROPERTY
REVIEW COMMITTEE**

July 23, 2024

Eileen Kastura, Chairman called the meeting of the **BERKS COUNTY BLIGHTED PROPERTY REVIEW COMMITTEE (BPRC)** to order at 2:32 P.M. on July 23, 2024. The meeting was held as a public meeting by way of the Zoom virtual platform and allowed for full Committee and public interaction during the meeting and hearings. The following Committee members were present during the meeting:

Eileen Kastura, Chairman
Denise Commings, Vice Chair (joined after call to order)
Ronald Heim, Secretary
Lee Olsen, AIA

Commissioner Michael Rivera was absent. After Roll Call, Chairman Kastura declared a quorum.

Also in attendance were:

Jaime Perez, Deputy Director, Redevelopment Authority of the County of Berks
Pauline Klopp, Redevelopment Authority of the County of Berks
Joan E. London, Esquire of Kozloff Stoudt, P.C., Solicitor
Joshua Young, Code Enforcement Officer, Borough of Kutztown
Adam Bender, Code Official, Borough of Mt. Penn
William Frymoyer, Code Official, Cumru Township
Amy Beakley, Manager, Borough of Hamburg
Ryan Wessner, Zoning Officer, Borough of Hamburg
Timothy Daley, Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity
Iris Bellman, Office Manager, Habitat for Humanity
Glenn Bertolet, Kraft Municipal Services (Code Official, Borough of Lenhartsville)
Jeffrey Hogg, Kraft Municipal Services (Code Official, Borough of Wyomissing)
Marissa Bennett, Karasch (Court Reporter)

The minutes of the meeting of March 26, 2024 and May 21, 2024 meetings had been distributed to the members prior to the meeting. As there were insufficient members able to vote on the March minutes, a motion was made by Chairman Kastura, with a second by Mr. Heim, to table the consideration of the minutes to the September 24, 2024 agenda. Upon vote, the motion carried unanimously by the members present. A motion was made by Chairman Kastura, with a second by Mr. Heim, to approve the minutes of the May 21, 2024 meeting. Upon vote, the motion carried unanimously by the members present.

Under Old Business, Chairman Kastura announced the Certification Hearing for the property located at 103-105 East Main Street, Borough of Kutztown. Solicitor London advised and read into the record the prior determination of blight, certifications of municipal officials of code violations and hazardous conditions on the property, which have continued unabated. Despite notices, which were made a part of the record, the property owner was not present, and no one appeared on behalf of the property owner. At the conclusion of the hearing, a motion was made by Mr. Heim, with a second by Mr. Olsen, the members present voted unanimously to certify the property as blighted.

Under New Business, 63 Hemlock Road, Cumru Township, was discussed. William Frymoyer, on behalf of the Township, stated that approximately 30% of the debris on the outside had been cleaned up, but the condition of the property was still poor. A motion was made by Vice Chair Commings, with a second by Chairman Kastura, for authorization to advertise and hold a Determination Hearing for the property located at 63 Hemlock Road at the September 24, 2024 meeting. Upon vote, the motion carried unanimously by the members present.

The second item for consideration was the property at 102 E. Penn Street, Borough of Lenhartsville. Glenn Bertolet, on behalf of the Borough, reported to the Committee that the property had been in the same condition with no improvement since approximately 2017, and an inspection carried out under administrative search warrant revealed cracks and bulges in exterior and interior walls, raising concerns about structural soundness. There is also a considerable accumulation of rubbish in the yard, which has not been cleaned up. Efforts by Borough officials to work with the owners had been unsuccessful. A motion was made by Mr. Olsen, with a second by Mr. Heim, to send a First Strike Letter to the owner of the property at 102 East Penn Street, Borough of Lenhartsville. Upon vote, the motion carried unanimously by the members present.

The third item for consideration was the property at 1853 Old Lancaster Pike, Cumru Township. Mr. Frymoyer advised the Committee that there had been a fire at the property, and that rehabilitation had been started but not completed (Berks Fire and Water had been retained and reports having not been paid for work completed), and it has been in the same condition for the past three years. The Township has been mowing the grass due to the failure of the owners to do so. A motion was made by Vice Chair Commings, with a second by Mr. Olsen, to send a First Strike Letter to the owner of 1853 Old Lancaster Pike, Cumru Township. Upon vote, the motion carried unanimously by the members present.

The fourth item for consideration was the property at 1306 Penn Avenue, Borough of Wyomissing. Jeffrey Hogg reported that this property was brought to the attention of the Borough in the summer of 2023. There has been a Notice of Violation issued for a dilapidated garage, with no response from the owner. In April of 2024, a neighbor complained of rodents, and there is peeling paint. A motion was made by Chairman

Kastura, with a second by Vice Chair Commings to send a First Strike Letter to the owner of 1306 Penn Avenue, Borough of Wyomissing. Upon vote, the motion carried unanimously by the members present.

Chairman Kastura asked for updates from the Solicitor. Attorney London reported as follows:

- a. Update on the property located at 264 Friedensburg Road, Mt. Penn Borough - The porch is in the process of being replaced, and exterior has been cleaned up. About 10 tons of trash has been removed from the interior.
- b. Update on the property located at 708 Chew Street, Hamburg Borough - This is an apparent hoarding situation, and the owner is living elsewhere. The former Zoning Officer had sent a letter, current zoning officer will be taking action to have the property declared unfit for human habitation as a fire hazard.
- c. Update on the property located at 727 State Street, Hamburg Borough- This property had been purchased, but is now back on the market. The new owner has not paid past due invoices as required to be issued permits. There are also rotting trusses. The structure is dangerous and the property will be placarded as unfit for human habitation.
- d. Update on the property located at 2319 Fairview Avenue, Mt. Penn Borough - The conservatorship hearing was held, with Jamie Perez and Adam Bender testifying. After the hearing, Attorney London was contacted by an individual claiming to have purchased the property. Upon investigation, it was discovered that the property had been sold to a buyer in Western PA, with closing held last September, but the deed not having been recorded, so there would be no record discoverable of the sale. The Conservatorship Petition had to be withdrawn, as the property no longer qualified for conservatorship. The property had been sold by the Executors of the Anspach Estate in September 2023. The Executors had not advised the Estate's attorney (Eric L.B. Strahn, Esquire), of the sale, and the Deed was not recorded. The Buyer's name is Justin Griffith. The deed was recorded on the morning of June 26, 2024. The property is remaining in the Blighted Property process, even though the Nonprofit Development Corporation will not be acting as property conservator.

Chairman Kastura announced that the next Committee Meeting will be held on September 24, 2024. With no additional business items, a motion was made by Mr. Olsen

with a second by Chairman Kastura to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously by the members present, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:08 p.m.

BERKS COUNTY BLIGHTED
PROPERTY REVIEW
COMMITTEE



Ronald Heim, Secretary